

A woman with blonde hair styled in waves, wearing a strapless, floor-length gold gown with a full skirt, stands in a room with deep blue walls. To her left is a dark wooden vanity with a large, ornate gold mirror and several lit candles. To her right are heavy blue curtains. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the woman and her dress.

KITTY JONES

Beauty
AND THE
LESBIAN
BEAST

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Beauty and the Lesbian Beast

Kitty Jones

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BEAUTY AND THE LESBIAN BEAST

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Beauty and the Lesbian Beast

Kitty Jones

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A steamy retelling of Beauty and the Beast

Eloise wants nothing more than to sit around town with her nose in a book. She's constantly avoiding the advances of the handsome men - and beautiful women - in town. She doesn't have time for love. She's too busy taking care of her aging father to take notice of anyone else, but when she's abducted on her way home from the library, everything changes.

She's taken to a castle where the normal rules of society don't seem to apply. She's told that she can never leave, that she can never escape, and that's been taken as a way to pay her father's debt to the most feared and vicious creature in all of Southaven: Genevieve.

Genevieve is a monster. At least, that's what Eloise has always heard, but when she's face to face with the beautiful princess, Eloise isn't quite so sure.

Genevieve is hiding something, and Eloise intends to find out.

Why isn't she allowed in the west wing?

Why are all of the servants so hesitant to talk to Eloise?

Worst of all, why does Eloise think there's more to the story regarding her abduction?

When Eloise has a chance to escape, she's faced with an impossible choice. Should she risk her life and run back to her father? Or should she stay with Genevieve to find out what she's hiding?

Author's note: this is an erotic lesbian romance with dubious consent, spankings, and kidnapping. Bring your tears - and maybe your vibrators - for this one.

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Prologue

10 years ago

Genevieve

The tears on my face weren't nearly as bad as the fact that she was dead.

"Are you sure?" I whispered, trying to get the doctor to offer me a little bit of hope. I looked up at her, but she shook her head sharply, instantly killing any anticipation I might have had. There was no good answer. There wasn't going to be a happy ending today.

The tears came faster than I expected, and they hurt as they hit the wounds on my face. Long, deep cuts covered my cheek, and the salt from my tears burned. I cried even harder, partly from the news about Laura, but partly because the physical pain was so horrible.

"No!" The doctor ran over and started going to work on my face, touching the bandages and adjusting them. "Please don't cry," she said. "I just finished bandaging you up."

"Please tell me it's not true," I whispered.

It couldn't be true.

It just couldn't.

There was no way, no how, that my true love could be gone. She couldn't be dead. We had just been together. We had been enjoying a wonderful day. We'd been sharing a wonderful life.

"She's gone," the doctor said carefully. She was touching the bandages, adjusting her careful work. She'd spent so much time making sure my face was patched up correctly. She had cleaned my wounds, and she'd closed them as much as possible, and she'd bandaged me. I hated that I had destroyed her careful work with a few sloppy tears, but I hated what she was saying even more.

She had to be wrong.

“No,” I whispered.

“I’m really sorry,” the doctor said gently. She touched my hand, patting it. “We did everything that we could.”

But it didn’t seem true.

It didn’t seem fair.

How could they have done everything? There had to be something else they could try, something else that could bring her back. Wasn’t this a modern hospital? Weren’t there machines that could keep people alive? The doctor had made a horrible mistake. I knew that in my heart. There had to still be more they could do. Laura couldn’t be dead.

I couldn’t face another day without her by my side: much less an eternity. There was no way I could live without Laura. I couldn’t get up and get dressed knowing that I’d never see her face again. There was no possibility that I could do my job or take care of the castle without her. We were supposed to be forever, her and I. We were supposed to grow old loving one another.

Now...

“You’re wrong,” I said.

The doctor sighed and shook her head. I knew what was coming next before she even started speaking. They were going to drug me so that I would stop panicking. That’s what I was doing. I was freaking out beyond all recognition because they’d told me something that I really, really didn’t want to believe.

She couldn’t be gone.

I was breathing rapidly, and I knew my heartrate was elevated. That wasn’t good for me, but neither was living without her.

“I’m going to give you something,” the doctor said, moving to my IV.

“Please don’t.”

I didn’t want the pain to be numbed. What if I forgot her? She was dead. My true love was gone. I didn’t deserve to be medicated. I didn’t want to pass out and forget this moment. I wanted to remember her for always.

“You don’t need to be awake right now,” the doctor said gently. She moved around the room easily. A nurse came in and the two of them spoke for a moment.

“Please,” I whispered.

“When you wake up, everything will be less painful,” the doctor said, but we both knew that was a lie. There was no way that the pain was going away. My face was destroyed: utterly ruined. Nobody would ever love me again.

And the only person I wanted to love me was dead.

“Shhh,” someone whispered. My eyes closed, so I didn’t know whether it was the doctor or the nurse speaking. “Everything is going to be okay.”

“You’re going to have to be very brave,” one of them said.

Brave?

I didn’t feel brave.

That wasn’t who I was.

I didn’t know how I was going to make it through each day after this. I didn’t even know if I wanted to stay alive, but one thing was absolutely, completely for certain.

I would never love again.

1.

Eloise

There really was not much to Southaven. It was a tiny little town where nothing ever happened. We still had dial-up Internet and flip phones, and most of the townspeople had landlines. There was a little used bookstore, and a small-town library, and those two places were where I spent most of my time.

“Hey, Book Girl,” someone yelled out. I turned, and my blonde hair bounced a little as I did. I usually wore it down or pulled back in a little ribbon. It was embarrassing that I answered to anything other than my real name. “Book Girl” wasn’t exactly a nice name to be called, but it described who I was.

I was a girl, and I loved books. I sold books, I read books, and I surrounded myself by books. I knew better than to answer to such a name, but I responded to it, anyway. It was obviously me they were talking about.

The person yelling at me smiled when they realized they’d finally gotten my attention. I knew him, too. It was Gerald: the handsome, popular guy in town. He was known for being something of an asshole. Still, that didn’t seem to stop anyone from liking him. Every guy in town wanted to be him and every girl wanted to sleep with him. Hell, some of the guys wanted that, too.

“Can I help you?” I asked, setting down the stack of books I’d been carrying. I was working at the bookstore. It was where I spent most of my time, so the owner had offered me a part-time position. The pay sucked, but it was better than nothing, and it kept me busy. I had planned on going to college in a far-away city after high school, but then my mother had gotten sick, so I’d stayed.

Then she’d died, so I’d stayed.

Then my father needed me, so I’d stayed.

Now I was pushing 25, and I still hadn't left.

Had too much time passed?

Somehow, with each passing year, I felt the need to leave town lessen. Maybe that was a bad thing. Maybe not. I had become complacent over the years, and I'd started getting comfortable in my own normalcy.

Once upon a time, I had dreamed big. I had wanted to paint wonderful art. I had wanted to dance. There were so many things that I had wanted. Now...

Well, now I was content to read new books once in awhile. Besides, working at a bookstore wasn't the worst thing in the world.

"Well, that depends," Gerald said. It was easy to see what people liked about him. He was tall and handsome, and he exuded confidence. People like that. They loved when someone was confident and when someone was just the right amount of bossy.

"On?"

"On what you're doing tonight after work," he said.

"I don't really know what that has to do with helping you find a book," I pointed out.

"I don't need help finding a book."

"Then why are you wasting my time?" I asked him in a sickly-sweet voice. I blinked innocently at him, as though I didn't know what a total bitch I was being.

I knew it.

I knew I wasn't being polite or having good customer service. The problem was that I didn't exactly care. Gerald was the kind of guy who never took "no" for an answer. Being rude and abrupt to him was the only message he ever did seem to receive.

He raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms over his chest. He was pure muscle, and that probably should have scared me more than it did. It definitely didn't turn me on. I understood, logically, why people were attracted to him, but that didn't mean that I was.

Man meat?

That did nothing for me.

I'd known early on in life that I wasn't attracted to men the way people thought I was supposed to be. There was just something about men that seemed animalistic and feral. Not that some women weren't that way. There were plenty of girls who were strong and wild. Either way, I'd known as a child that my feelings toward women weren't exactly considered "normal," so I'd kept the fact that I was a lesbian to myself. Even my father didn't know about my attraction to females. Unless I ever fell in love and wanted to get married, he'd never know.

"You know, I think you have something of an attitude problem," he said.

"And I think I could say the same thing about you. Now, can I help you find a book, or were you leaving?" I stared at him, trying to summon my best inner-bitch abilities. Apparently, it finally worked because he glared at me. Gerald opened and closed his mouth twice, as though he couldn't quite find the words he was looking for.

"Whatever," he finally said. Then he turned and left, stomping out of the store. He tried to slam the door as he left, but it was the type of door you couldn't slam at all, and it slowly swung closed all on its own. As soon as it was shut, I breathed a sigh of relief.

He was gone.

Finally.

I sighed, leaning back against the counter of the little shop. I didn't get paid enough to deal with assholes like him. I definitely didn't get paid enough to

deal with the bullshit he dished out. Gerald was a pain in my ass that I didn't need. I was more than happy he was gone.

"Wow," a feminine voice said. I turned to see a customer approaching the counter. She set a book down and looked at me. She was wearing a little hat with a veil, so I couldn't see her face very clearly. Her entire aesthetic was very gothic: lacy black dress, wristlets, and a beautiful necklace. I hadn't seen her before. She could have been a traveler, or perhaps she was just in town on business. Either way, she was very lovely, and wildly pretty. I found myself struggling to resist the urge to reach out and touch her.

"Wow?" I asked, swallowing hard. Why had she said that? I felt a little bad I hadn't noticed her, and I felt a little embarrassed she had seen my interaction with Gerald. He was kind of a bully, and I probably should have been more patient. Besides, this woman was lovely. I didn't want her to think less of me for the way I'd treated a paying customer. I wanted Gerald to think I was awful so that he'd stay away from me. This woman? I didn't want her to think I was awful. In fact, I wanted the exact opposite of that. I wanted her to think I was wonderful.

"I'm happy to see someone finally stood up to him," she said.

So, she wasn't new in town. Why hadn't I noticed her before? She seemed like the kind of person who was impossible to miss. Then again, she had that veil on. Maybe she was the type of person who tried to blend in. Perhaps she liked being unnoticed.

"You know that guy?" I asked, curious. Gerald was hard to miss. He was very abrasive, and even though people seemed to love him, I had the feeling that a lot of people were scared of him, too. He was the kind of person you didn't want to cross. Perhaps being rude to him had been a poor decision.

"I've seen him around," she said carefully. The woman didn't reveal much. I couldn't really see her face because of the little veil. All I could see was that she had a soft disposition and a gentle voice. She seemed strong, though. She seemed like the kind of person who didn't let other people walk all over her. That was the kind of person I wanted to be.

“I’m guessing you two aren’t exactly close,” I said, taking the book she wanted. I rang it up and put it in a paper bag for her. I threw in a couple of bookmarks and some stickers. It was up to me how much swag I gave out to people who came into the shop, but I wanted to make a good impression with this lady, so I gave more than I usually would. What was a few extra bookmarks if it meant she would remember me?

I definitely wanted her to remember me.

“You could say that.”

I told her the total for her purchase, but the woman shook her head. Even with the veil, I could tell she was confused by the number I gave her.

“That’s not right,” she said. “It wasn’t discounted. Can you check again, please? I think it should have been more.” She tapped her fingers on the counter, but not in an annoying way. It was more like, she was thinking, and trying to understand why the price was so low.

“I gave you my employee discount,” I told her simply.

“What? Why?” She held a hand up and started to reach for her mouth, as though she was surprised. Was she nervous? I wasn’t trying to be flirty, but...I liked her. There was something about her that made me curious to find out more. I had never been particularly clever when it came to flirting or letting people know I liked them, but I’d been trying to take the initiative a little more.

“Us girls have to stick together, right?” I asked, smiling. Inwardly, I cringed. Okay, so I completely sucked at talking to girls. Like, I totally, absolutely was horrible at it. It wasn’t that I didn’t try. I definitely tried. Sometimes, when I saw a girl I liked, though, my brain just decided to completely abandon me. Talking to guys had always been easy for me, but that was probably just because I didn’t look at them and want to melt into the floor. With this girl, I could melt right into the ground if she wanted me to.

“Right,” she said slowly. She handed me her money then, and I made her change before giving it back to her. When I dropped the coins into her hand, our fingers touched, and a jolt of electricity shot through my body. Shit. I could not be getting a crush on her. I absolutely, totally couldn’t have a crush on my customer. Besides, I was probably never going to see her again. The idea of wanting her should have been far from my mind.

She didn’t seem to notice, though. While I had felt like my entire world was on fire, she seemed completely normal. The woman just took the money and put it back in her little lace coin purse. Then she looked up at me. I imagined she was smiling. I could barely see her face through the veil. If I squinted, I could see her a little bit more clearly, but I didn’t want to be squinting. Mostly, I didn’t want to be weird or to make things anymore awkward than they already were.

“Don’t feel bad,” she said, taking the bag with her book inside.

“Excuse me?”

“About dipshit over there,” she jerked her head toward the door. I could see Gerald across the street smoking. Was he watching the building? What the actual fuck? “You did the right thing. He was being an ass.” That was putting it lightly. She was right about him.

“Thanks,” I said, surprised at her support. “I appreciate that.”

“Anytime.”

She turned then, and left, and I watched as she walked away. Who was she? Why hadn’t I seen this woman before? She looked old-fashioned and beautiful, and even though I couldn’t really see her face clearly, she had seemed kind, gentle.

Why the hell couldn’t I meet a girl like that?

Shaking my head, I tried to push her out of my mind. I had some shelving to do before my boss came back, and then I needed to hurry up and get home. My dad would be hungry, and someone had to clean up the house.

He was in poor health these days, and even though he went out from time to time to spend time with his friends or to do volunteer work, he mostly rested at home.

Another customer came into the shop and needed help, so I found that the rest of my day kind of flew by. When it was time to leave, I'd forgotten about the mysterious woman in black, as well as my encounter with Gerald. Then I had to leave and walk home, and as soon as I was outside, I remembered.

They had both been strange. He had been pushy and arrogant, which wasn't anything new for him. The fact that he'd come into the bookstore had been odd, though. He was the type of person who didn't like reading. A guy like Gerald could never understand the drawing power of a book, so why had he wandered into the shop?

Why today?

Out of every day in the damn world, why had he chosen this one to come inside?

I had no good answer for that.

A shiver shot through me as I walked. Then there had been the mysterious lady. I wondered if I'd ever get to see her again. It wasn't everyday that a woman piqued my interest like that. Oh, I wasn't exactly timid when it came to accepting my sexuality, but I rarely had chances to explore it. My dad kept me busy. Coupled with work, the idea of dating was far from my head. Besides, I couldn't exactly be open about who I liked, and I wasn't going to date a man just for the sake of not being alone.

Back in high school, when my mother had been alive, I'd had more privacy. I'd had more time to explore my urges and my desires. In some ways, it seemed as though I could be truer to myself back then. I'd dated a little bit in high school, albeit discreetly, so I wasn't exactly a virgin. Still, it had been a long time since I'd touched another woman. Seeing the lady in black had awakened a part of me I'd thought was dead and buried.

It was dark on Main Street as I walked home, lost in thought. The streetlights that normally lit the small road were out. Strange. I wondered if I needed to call the city about it. Then again, someone else would probably report it: one of the shop owners, maybe. There were enough old people in town that if something serious was wrong, they'd let the town know. Senior citizens had a way of paying attention to the things that happened in a town. They were always very quick to report problems and to let anyone know when something bad had happened.

I walked quickly, following my usual path. I thought I heard someone behind me, and I stopped, turning back. I squinted, looking into the darkness. It wasn't pitch-black out, but it was darker than usual, and there was no reason anyone else should be walking tonight. Yes, sometimes Betty from down the road walked her dog, but this was late, even for her. I had a feeling that if someone was lurking, it wasn't Betty, and it didn't mean anything good.

"Hello?" I called into the darkness. It was a stupid thing to say. What did I expect? Did I think that if I called out, whoever was there would reveal themselves to me? I'd seen enough movies to know that kind of thing didn't happen in real life. It couldn't.

If someone actually was following me, then they'd wait until the opportune moment. As soon as they thought that the coast was clear, they'd attack. That was a problem. I'd never really felt unsafe before on these walks home. I had never worried for myself. Now, I realized that my carelessness had been a bit silly.

Nobody came out of the darkness. Nobody attacked me. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being watched. I turned back around and kept moving toward my house. I walked faster. My footsteps seemed to echo in the darkness, and I walked even more quickly. Soon, I was doing a sort of little half-walk, half-run.

I glanced over my shoulder again. I was certain that I heard a second set of footsteps in the darkness behind me.

Who was there?

Why was someone lurking in the shadows?

Why were they following me?

I started to sweat as I turned back around once more. I kept walking swiftly, trying to keep my pace as even as possible. I didn't want to full-on run in the dark and accidentally fall or hurt myself, but soon I became absolutely convinced that there really was someone behind me, and I forgot about walking. I started to run. I made it to the edge of a building, and then a shadowy figure stepped in front of me.

"I've been waiting for you," they said.

Then everything went black.

2.

Eloise

My head hurt.

My arms hurt.

My legs hurt.

Everything hurt, and I was cold.

Somehow, I managed to open my eyes, but I couldn't see anything at first. I blinked a few times, trying to see in the darkness, but it proved futile. I couldn't make out shadows or anything, really. It was just...dark. I took a few deep breaths, looking around. Soon things did seem to come into focus, if only a little. I was in a room of some sort, and it was small. There was a window. I could see a door, too. There was no furniture in this room, and I was on the floor. It was a little bit cold, and I felt chilly.

"Hello?" I called out nervously. Where the hell was I? The last thing I remembered was walking home from work. Well, I hadn't finished walking home, had I? Something had happened on the way, something horrible. It wasn't supposed to be that way. I was supposed to have walked straight home and made dinner for my father. It would have been a very late supper, considering the fact that it was dark when I usually got home, but he didn't complain. I hadn't made it back, though.

I thought of the shadowy figure who had stepped in front of me. Someone had found me. They'd taken me, and now I was here. I was old enough to understand that this meant I had been captured. What else did it mean? I wasn't sure how scared I should be. Maybe they were holding me for ransom. Perhaps they wanted something more sinister. When you were captured, wasn't there supposed to be a meet-and-greet with the kidnappers? Wasn't there supposed to be a time when they came to you and said who they were and what they wanted?

"You're awake."

So, there was someone.

“I wondered when you were going to get up.”

The voice.

It was female...and familiar. I searched my memory, trying to think of where I'd heard it. It was only yesterday that I'd met someone new. This was her voice. How could it be the woman from the shop? What was she doing here? Or maybe...maybe I was wrong, and I didn't know this person's voice at all. Maybe it wasn't her...

“Where am I?” I asked quietly. I tried not to panic. I tried not to ask, “Who are you? What do you want?” I tried not to be a walking cliché, but I was panicking. I had been taken, and I didn't know the rules surrounding this situation yet. I didn't know if I was going to be beaten or hurt or released. I didn't know if this was just one big giant mistake.

“Where do you think you are?” The voice countered. I was sitting on the cold, hard floor in the darkness. Judging by the stone walls and the icy chill on the floor, I'd say I was in a very old building. It was a place that didn't have a lot of insulation, anyway. Maybe it was an abandoned warehouse or an old school or something.

Or maybe, I thought, realizing that the room was round, maybe I was in a castle tower.

“What am I doing here?” I asked. My throat hurt. It was sore. “I want to go home.”

“I'm sure that you do.”

The woman speaking to me seemed very calm. It was eerie, really. Why the hell was she so calm? Had she kidnapped me? Well, I suppose it wasn't kidnapping if I was an adult. Still, was she the one who abducted me?

What did she want?

“I don't have any money,” I said, venturing a guess. “Do you want money?”

The woman laughed.

“Darling, I have more money than you could possibly imagine. No, I don’t want your money.”

“Then why did you take me?” I realized that my being here wasn’t an accident. I didn’t just randomly wake up on someone’s floor. Someone had grabbed me. Had it been her? Had it been this woman? My accusation was more than just a feigned threat: it was a question. Was she the one who had captured me? Was she going to let me go?

“Why do you think I took you?” She asked. She snapped her fingers and the lights in the room came on. I shrieked and covered my eyes. I had been in the darkness long enough that the brightness was jolting, and it was also a little bit painful.

“Ouch!” I cried out. “How about a little warning next time?”

She grabbed me by the hair and pulled me to my feet.

“How about a little bit of manners next time?” She responded.

“You’re hurting me.”

“Darling, I haven’t begun to hurt you,” she said. She tugged on my hair again, pulling my head back so I was looking directly at her. Yes, it was the woman from the shop. She still had the same veil covering her face, and her perfume was the same. Her outfit was different, I guessed, but I couldn’t really see it with how she was holding me.

That was when I realized I was actually in trouble. She hadn’t just been some patron, had she? I tried to remember the name of the book she’d purchased, but I couldn’t. It had been something weird, something strange. It had been some sort of dark romance, hadn’t it? Yes, that was right. Maybe it had been an omen that I should have taken a little more seriously. Perhaps it had been a warning. Maybe if I’d realized she was crazy, and I hadn’t sold her the book, she wouldn’t have captured me. Was that how these things worked?

Now I was stuck, captured, and she could do whatever she wanted to me. Was she going to kill me? I kind of felt like she was going to, judging from the way she was yanking on my hair. I wiggled, trying to free myself, but she reached around and pinched my nipple – hard.

That was when I realized I was naked.

I was totally, completely, naked.

No wonder I was so cold.

“What the fuck!?” I cried out. And she pinched it harder.

“Close your mouth.”

She was calm, stoic, and I wondered how she managed to stay so relaxed during this encounter. I was angry. I was scared. I didn’t know where I was or who she was or what was going to happen. What was worse was that I didn’t have any way to escape. If I didn’t know where I was, how could I even start to formulate a plan for running away?

My best bet was probably to just listen, right? Unfortunately for this lady, I was the daughter of a poker player. Before my dad had gotten sick, he had been at the top of his game. He’d won all the time, never lost, and taught me everything he knew about keeping a straight face. Had he taught me to play cards? No, but he’d taught me how to avoid looking suspicious.

He’d taught me how to keep people from knowing what I was up to.

So, I snapped my mouth shut. Fine. She wanted silence? She’d get it. For now. It was only a game, I told myself. It was only until I could figure out a way to escape. Besides, I wanted my clothes back. Maybe if she thought I was being obedient, she’d give them to me.

The woman loosened her grip on my hair, releasing me. I pulled away and stood. Then I turned to look at her. She didn’t take off the veil. She was wearing a deep purple dress very similar to the one I’d seen her in the day before, and she smelled so fucking good.

“What do you want from me?” I whispered.

“Everything,” she said simply.

“What does that mean?”

“I want everything: your life, your loyalty, your submission.”

My submission?

Waves of heat rolled over my body at that word. I’d heard it before. I knew what it implied. I might be from a small town, but I wasn’t an innocent. I wasn’t a virgin. I’d been with people before. I’d been with women who made me feel like I was excited, and aroused, but no one had ever talked to me about submission before.

No one had ever commanded that I give them my submission.

I realized, standing there, that I wasn’t completely sure what submission looked like. No one had brought that up with me before, and aside from a few sneakily consumed books, I didn’t know much about the darkness surrounding that idea. What was she going to demand from me? When she said she wanted my submission, I knew I was going to have to give her something, and I wasn’t sure what that was going to be. Something told me I was about to find out, though. The fact that I was naked and locked in a room with just this woman for company told me everything I needed to know for now.

I knew that I was going to be here for a very long time, and I knew that my time here was going to be uncomfortable for me.

“Why me?” I whispered.

The woman stared at me, and for a moment, I thought she was going to keep the information away from me. Maybe she would tuck it away to use at a future date, but she didn’t.

“Your father,” she said simply.

“My father?” That got my attention. Was he worried about me? Did he know where I’d gone? “My father doesn’t have any money,” I said. “He can’t pay you. If you need a ransom, well...”

My voice trailed off.

There was no one else I could ask for money. My mother had died years ago, and I was alone in the world aside from my dad. I’d spent the last few years taking care of him, but he’d taken care of me, too. We’d been the best of friends, or so I’d thought. What was my dad thinking now? Had he noticed I’d been taken? Had he called the police? More importantly, I wondered: was anyone looking for me? There had to be someone looking for me.

My town might be small, but it was still a modern place with laws and rules and regulations. You couldn’t just kidnap people. You couldn’t just abduct a woman and not have anyone notice. Someone had to notice, didn’t they?

Then again, I wasn’t exactly known for having a lot of friends or being very popular.

The woman laughed, but it was a cold sort of laugh, as though she couldn’t believe I was being so dumb or naïve or careless. It rankled me a little. How dare she laugh at me? She couldn’t even talk to people without a stupid veil on her face, yet she had the balls to laugh at me? If I wasn’t so scared, I would have been annoyed.

“Your father has plenty of money, love.” Her voice came out icy and callous, but also matter-of-fact. She was speaking as though she was quite certain of what she was saying.

What was she talking about?

“You must have me confused with someone else then,” I said. Maybe this was all a big mistake. Suddenly, hope fluttered in my chest. Would she realize she had taken the wrong girl and let me go? That was it, wasn’t it? It was a mistake. She could release me, and I would promise to forget everything that happened. In a few days, it would all just be a bad memory.

That was it, yes. She didn't have to keep me here. She could go find the girl she was looking for: the one with the rich father.

The woman looked at me and cocked her head.

"My father is sick," I repeated. "I think you must have the wrong girl. My father isn't wealthy at all. He hasn't worked in a few years. He doesn't have any money."

"Again," she said coolly. "He has plenty of money, which is why it was so unfortunate that he chose not to repay his debt to me."

"Debt?"

"Debt."

"What debt?"

"Your father has a gambling problem. Are you telling me you didn't know?"

"That's impossible," I shook my head. "He's home sick all the time." He had been for a long time. Ever since my mother's death, he'd been struggling. He'd had a hard time with his life and dealing with his health problems had only exacerbated his anxiety and stress. He spent most of his time resting in bed while I went out and worked.

"He's never home," she said. She softened her voice a little, and I detected something else.

Pity.

She pitied me.

"When you leave for work, the first thing he does is go play poker. He wins big and he loses big, and he borrows money from people all over. Plenty of people owe him money, too, which is the only reason he's not dead right now."

I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. It couldn't be true. I didn't want to think of it as being true. There was no way she was being honest or truthful. My father hadn't played poker in years. Ever since my mother passed away, he'd basically been bedridden. While he'd played games once upon a time, those days were long over...weren't they?

"This can't be right."

"It's right."

"There must be some sort of misunderstanding."

"There's not."

Could it be true? She seemed so certain and I... Well, suddenly, there was the faintest amount of doubt presenting itself in my mind. What if she was telling the truth? Had my father been lying to me? Tricking me?

"So why am I here?" I whispered. "If he owes you money, why aren't you trying to get the money from him?"

She stared at me, waiting for me to figure things out. It took me longer than it should have to realize what was happening. Suddenly, everything clicked into place, and I realized what she wasn't saying. I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, and I thought I was going to be sick.

Then it was obvious.

"I'm the payment," I whispered.

"You're the payment."

"You kidnapped me," I whispered.

"No," she said. "You were delivered to me."

"Who delivered me?"

Again, she waited, watching me. I got the feeling that she was trying to figure out how clueless and stupid I really was. All of a sudden, I felt pretty fucking clueless. Was she right? Was she telling me the truth? There was no logical reason I should trust a stranger over my own father. There was no reason at all that I should believe her over the man who had raised me, except for the fact that there had been strange inconsistencies with my father.

I'd brushed them off.

I'd ignored them.

I'd believed excuses for seemingly random things. I hadn't been able to find my mother's silver necklace, and he'd told me he was having the chain repaired. Only, I didn't remember the chain breaking. Had he taken it? Had he sold it?

Then there was the time I'd gotten home, and he'd seemed out of breath. He'd told me he was just tired, but he had looked like he'd been running. I thought, for a second, he might have been trying to beat me home from work, but that would have been crazy. His shoes hadn't been by the door, though. They'd been on his feet, and he was not the type of person to wear shoes in the house.

What about the time I'd called out to him and he hadn't answered? I'd tried to open his bedroom door, but it had been locked. He'd told me later he was sleeping soundly, but the window was open when he told me that. Had he sneaked out? Had he tried to run out when I wasn't paying attention?

All of a sudden, everything hit me all at once, and I crumpled to the floor. This couldn't be happening. Not really. Not to someone like me. My own father couldn't have betrayed me like this. He had secrets, apparently. I didn't want this to be true. I didn't want it to be real. I cared about my dad more than anything else in the world. He was my best friend, and I was his little girl.

Or was I?

Had my father...

“He gave me to you,” I whispered.

“Yes.”

“As payment.”

The idea that I was being used as human payment for money my father owed this woman felt strange and weird and uncomfortable. It made me feel sick, actually, and I just knew that I had to be missing something.

He couldn't have done it. Traded his own daughter? Who did that? Even my father wouldn't have done that unless...

“How much did he owe you?” I whispered. Was it a huge amount? Had he tried to sell the house and his other belongings first? Maybe that was why our home seemed so much emptier than it had when I was a child.

She looked at me for a minute. Then the woman asked a question of her own.

“Is that important?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Because I wanted to know how much my life was worth to my own dad.

“I want to know the value he placed on me.” My words were hard to get out. They seemed to catch in my throat as I spoke.

“Half a million,” she said.

I let that roll around in my head for a moment. I was still sitting on the ground, and it was a good thing, because I felt sick, dizzy. Half a million? He owed that much? But how?

“You said he had plenty of money.”

“He does,” she said. “For the things he wants money. Trust me, darling: he paid his favorite debtors first, and he saved me for last. If I had to guess, he’s back at the tables right now trying to reclaim his cash. By the end of the day, he’ll be sitting in that pub he loves so much drinking away his earnings.”

“The pub?”

She sighed, irritated, as though she couldn’t believe I really was this naïve.

“Yes.”

“But...”

“Let me guess; he told you he doesn’t drink.”

“He doesn’t.”

“He does,” she said. “And my patience with you is starting to wear thin. How did you not know about your father’s discrepancies?”

“What do you mean?” I whispered.

“How could you not have known he was sneaking out to gamble and drink?”

Because my nose really was always in a book.

Because I’d been sad since my mother died.

Because I was an idiot, apparently, who only saw what he wanted me to see, and I never asked questions.

“He told me he was sick.”

“Did you ever take him to the doctor’s?”

“No, but he went.”

“He told you he was going.”

“He had medicine at the house. I saw him take it.”

“Probably painkillers,” she said.

I swallowed hard. Reality was swirling around me in a chaotic sort of madness, and I felt like I was going to go crazy. My dad had lied to me, and he’d given me away as some sort of debt repayment. Maybe this woman would have me doing manual labor. I didn’t want to ask.

“And how long do I have to stay?” I whispered, asking something else instead.

“Forever. This is your home now,” the woman said. “So, I suggest you get used to it.”

3.

Genevieve

The girl was a beauty . There was no doubt about it. She must have been ten years younger than me, but she was more naïve than any woman should have been. In her mid-twenties, she should have been aware of her father's habits. She should have known.

Could I fault her for not being aware, though?

There had been plenty of things about my own father that I hadn't known. Parents had a nasty habit of keeping secrets from their children in order to "protect" them. Most of the time, those secrets were much more harmful than anyone could possibly imagine, though.

Eloise had been devastated when I'd told her about her father's trade. She hadn't wanted to believe it, but she had. I had seen her face as the puzzle pieces all seemed to suddenly fit together, and I'd seen the horror on her face when she realized she was expendable to him. Peter was disgusting. What kind of man traded his own daughter to repay a debt? He was the worst human being I'd ever met, and I'd met quite a few people.

When I left her in the tower room with the door locked, I stood outside of it for a few minutes. I wanted to make sure she wasn't crying. Not that it mattered. The idea of her being hurt and scared bothered me, though. She hadn't asked for this. It was her life now, and she was going to have to get used to it, but she hadn't asked for it.

I made my way down the winding staircase and pushed past Margaret and Dominique, who were talking at the base of the stairs. They were my most trusted employees, and they respected everything that I said. While there were plenty of people I had to worry about, Margaret and Domonique were not included. They were wildly trustworthy.

"Don't let her out," I warned them. "You can bring her a small meal, but only simple foods: sandwiches and water." The last thing I needed was for

her to become attached to my servants. No, her loyalty was going to be to me, and she was going to learn as fast as possible that I was the one in charge: not her. I had a feeling it was going to be a hard lesson. Taking care of her wasn't going to be easy.

"Understood," Margaret said.

Dominique nodded, but bit his lip.

They both looked like they wanted to say something, so I waited, curious to see what my two servants would dare to offer. They had both been with me long enough to know that I didn't accept disobedience in any form. I certainly didn't accept someone questioning my methods.

"Mistress," Margaret said slowly. "Would you like us to have her shower?"

I thought about that. Eloise had been taken after darkness had fallen, and she'd slept – albeit uncomfortably – on the tower floor. There was nothing in the room at all but a door and a barred window. She had no escape, and nothing to keep her comfortable at all. That was important to me. I wanted to break down everything about her so I could shape her into who I wanted her to be. She had been drugged by whoever brought her to me, which was why she'd slept for so long.

I wasn't a monster. Despite what people said about me, I cared for my property. That's what Eloise was to me now: property. I had guarded her for hours, only taking leave to use the restroom and get a drink from time to time. When she'd stirred, it had been a relief. She hadn't died after her arrival, hadn't had any permanent reaction to the drugs her captors had given her. Now it was the middle of the night, and she was probably hungry. It was a good thing that Margaret and Dominique were going to bring her something. They could feed her and then she could go back to sleep. In the morning, we'd start her training.

Aside from the fact that she was probably starving, she was dirty. She smelled. She was sweaty and grimy, and she was naked on a dirty, dusty floor. I tried not to think about how beautiful she'd looked sprawled out on the floor with her entire body visible to me.

Yes, she needed a shower.

I wanted to be the one to do it, though. I wanted to bathe her, clean her, wash her. I wanted her to know that everything good she received would come from me and me alone. I was her mistress, and I was the one in charge of her life. The sooner she realized that, the sooner Eloise would be able to adjust to her new life.

“No,” I said finally. “I’ll do that later.”

“What are we permitted to say to her?” Dominique asked. “If we bring her food, she’ll have questions.”

“You can tell her the rules,” I said. “She’ll obviously cling to you as friends. Don’t underestimate her, though,” I said. “Don’t let her sneak by you. She will try to run when you go in. She’ll try today, and probably tomorrow. By the end of the week, she should have come to realize that this is her home. We aren’t in any rush. I have no plans until next week, so she’ll be trained carefully each and every day until then.”

“Understood,” Dominique said.

“I understand,” Margaret echoed.

Together, the two of them headed down the stairs and toward the kitchen, presumably to start preparing food for our new resident. I couldn’t think of her as a guest, much as I wanted to. There was still a part of me that hated Peter Anouilh for what he’d done to his child.

He’d given her away. Traded her. Sold her. He’d been so damn eager to get her off his hands that it disgusted me. What kind of monster did that? She was better off with me, I thought, but then, that might not be true. There was still a lot for me to learn about Eloise, just as there was a lot for her to learn about me.

I made my way through the castle I called my home. It was personally designed by a friend of mine and created just for me. I was the only one who had ever lived here, and it was much too big for just one person.

Perhaps that was one of the reasons I had so many servants. It was nice to have other people living with me. It was nice to have other people in the same place as me.

I didn't like being all alone, especially in such a big place like this. Then again, I didn't exactly want a family, either. Families carried with them too many responsibilities, and as I could see in the life of my young captive, too many chances for betrayal.

Moving swiftly through the halls, I made my way to my private study. It was located in the west wing of the castle and was strictly off-limits for everyone. No one knew the passcode to the keypad that kept the door to this wing carefully locked.

That was how it was supposed to be.

Here, I could let myself be free. I took off my veil and my hat, and I took off my jacket, and I kicked off my shoes. Then I walked down the thick carpet, padding toward my office door. In the west wing, I had more than just an office. I had a pole studio for dancing. I had a private collection of books. I had movies. I had a little theater here. Of course, my bedroom was here, too. Anything I needed, I had here, and a dumbwaiter ensured that I had easy access to anything else I needed.

I could simply call one of my servants and they'd send up food or whatever other items I needed without ever having to step foot in this part of the castle. It was idyllic, really, and it made me happy.

When I was in the study, I sat down at my computer and started doing further research on Eloise's father. I thought I'd understood the man inside and out, but he had managed to capture his daughter's trust. How had he done that? He seemed like a snake to me, and he had from our first meeting. I was displeased with his behavior, but more than that, I was curious.

Who was this man, really?

And what was he going to do next?

There was no doubt in my mind that I hadn't seen the end of him. He would pull some sort of stunt. They always did. He would try to get his daughter back at some point. He'd either show up at my castle or he'd try to tell other people I'd kidnapped her. By the time that happened, I needed to have Eloise perfectly under control. She would need to be trained by then.

One thing was for certain: I wasn't letting the girl go.

I read until my eyes hurt. There was more information on the father than I had expected. Granted, I already knew quite a bit about him before I acquired his daughter as payment for his debts. It was my job, after all. I was supposed to know everything about everyone. That was what kept me in business.

Finally, I pushed away from my desk and went back downstairs. On the first floor, close to the tower where I was keeping the girl, there was a sitting room. It had a huge fireplace and several lovely sofas, as well as chairs. There was a big, soft carpet that I loved to wiggle my toes in. I sat on the couch and I relaxed, leaning back.

Eloise would be receiving her food right about now. How was she going to react? Was she going to eat? Was she going to be a good girl? I had no idea. She seemed willful and fiery. There was no doubt in my mind that she'd present a challenge. Oh, it would be a fun one. I couldn't wait to play with her and tease her and taunt her.

Of course, I'd be fucking her, too. That was just a given. I couldn't believe how damn beautiful she was. I'd barely been able to resist earlier when I'd been alone with her. I couldn't wait to watch her on her knees as she licked my pussy. It was going to be fucking hot as hell, and I was excited just thinking about it.

But first, I had to be patient.

So, I leaned back on the couch, and I waited to hear how she'd behaved at her mealtime.

4.

Eloise

The knock at the door was faint, but solid. I sat up, wiping my tears away. Had the person at the door heard me crying? I hoped not. Embarrassing. I didn't want anyone to know that the lady who stole me away had made me cry. My mother had been the bravest woman I'd ever known, and she was a firm believer in not letting people see you cry. If they did, then they'd know you had a weakness, and what was worse was that they'd be able to use that against you.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

No crying.

I couldn't afford to.

There was another knock, and I cringed. It was the woman again. I just knew it. I didn't want her to know she'd made me cry. Were my eyes red? Probably. Somehow, sharing that knowledge with her was going to just destroy me. I was already naked and dirty and I definitely smelled horrible. I didn't want to add to that humiliation by letting her see that I was being completely childish.

If she was coming to gloat, then I'd fight her. Yeah, I could do that. I could fight the horrible person who stole me away, who captured me. Couldn't I? Okay, so I wasn't very tall, and I wasn't very strong. I had sometimes been described as petite, but I didn't think that was totally accurate. I was a little short, sure, but I was scrappy.

That had to count for something.

I waited to see what would happen. I didn't call out. I didn't dare. Instead, I squeezed my mouth shut and stared at the door. The lights were still on. It was a small sort of reprieve, but it brought me a little bit of comfort. At least I didn't have to be in the dark.

Then again, I wasn't really sure that being able to see I was literally locked in a tower was any better.

Finally, despite the fact that I never called out to answer, the door opened, and two people came in: a man and a woman. The woman wore a simple dress that was dark purple. It was lacey and elegant, and she had boots on that matched. The man's clothing was similar. If I believed in the paranormal, I'd say they were vampires, but I didn't believe in things like that.

Nope.

In real life, there were no witches or wizards or magic-users. There were no shapeshifters or vampires or any fallen angels. There was no one here but us. I didn't believe in luck, and I didn't believe anyone was coming to save me. These people definitely weren't. No matter who they were, if they were here, it was because they belonged to the woman.

They were her people.

I stared at them. The man held a tray in his hands, and if I had to guess, there was food on it. I brought my legs up to my chest and wrapped my arms around them, trying to hide myself. They didn't need to see my body. Humiliation washed over me again, and I wondered how long it was going to take me to get over that. People had seen me naked before, but only by choice. When I'd been naked with my lovers, it was because I wanted them to see my body.

Now?

Now I didn't get to have any control over who looked at me. That was disgustingly awful.

"We brought you food," the woman said. "You should eat."

"Is it poisoned?" I whispered.

“No,” she said. She set the tray down on the floor. There was no furniture in the round little room. In fact, aside from the door – which was equipped with a security keypad – the only other “thing” in the room was a tiny window in the wall. It overlooked vast nothingness. I could see trees and trees and nothing else: no cities, no towers. Nothing.

“Why should I believe you?” I asked.

The man frowned.

“We aren’t your enemies,” he said.

I didn’t believe him.

Everyone here was my enemy. They were holding me against my will – all of them – and I needed to find a way to survive. I had to escape. I didn’t know if what the lady said about my father was true or not, but I needed to get home and confront him. After all, how would I know whether my dad was a hero or a villain until I talked to him?

I had to have a chance to ask if what she had told me was the truth. I had to. I couldn’t stay here, locked away in this tower. Now there were two people with me, and they were trying to feed me. I had a million thoughts running through my head, but most importantly, I knew that I couldn’t eat the food.

What if it had been drugged?

Or poisoned?

What if they had lured me here so they could do weird stuff to me? What if they wanted to hurt me and film it? People did weird stuff like that when they abducted people. I was innocent. I knew that much. I hadn’t asked to be taken, and I hadn’t been taken because of anything I’d done. Keeping me here wasn’t legal, like, at all. You couldn’t just kidnap people or abduct people. Then again, these people both knew that. They had to be servants of the lady who had taken me. I didn’t know her name or what she wanted with me, but I knew that these people must be well aware of the fact that their boss was a criminal.

And yet they worked for her.

“Look,” the man sighed. “Please eat the food.”

I stared at it nervously. There was a sandwich of some kind – maybe turkey – and a small serving of vegetables. There was also a glass of ice water. The ice had already started to melt, and there was condensation on the sides of the glass. I stared at it for a minute and then looked back up at the two people. They were watching me carefully.

Neither one of them moved.

“Are you supposed to wait here until I eat or something?” I asked.

“Yes,” the woman said.

The man just looked at me like I was an idiot, and worst of all, he looked at me impatiently. Well, excuse me if I wasn’t exactly leaping at the chance to try to eat poison. My stomach rumbled, and I tried to think about the last time I’d eaten.

Yesterday at dinner?

No, I’d been working.

Had I eaten lunch?

I couldn’t recall.

“Look,” the woman said. “Mistress Genevieve is going to be quite cross if we don’t hurry back. Now please, hurry and eat the food.” She looked desperate, pleading with me like this, but my jaw hit the floor.

“Genevieve?” I whispered. “That’s who she is?”

Both of the servants paled. Yeah, apparently, that had been a secret. They’d fucked up, and they knew it. The man stared at me as though I had grown horns, and then he asked me once more to eat.

“No thank you,” I said. “I’m not hungry.”

I thought about pushing past them while they were shocked. The door to the cell was still open. That’s what this place was, really: a cell. I could push past them and hurry through, but I knew that I shouldn’t. The guy – whatever his name was – was tall. He was slender, but I knew better than to think that meant he was weak. He’d grab me in no time. No, the time for escaping would come, but this wasn’t it.

Instead of trying to get past them, I turned around and faced the wall. I left my back to them and tried to ignore the fact that not only had two strangers seen me totally naked, but that I’d turned down perfectly good food.

Oh, and my captor was none other than the most feared bitch in this town. The people of Southaven were terribly frightened of her, but it was more than that. People in other places hated her, too. They were all indebted to her, and they were all scared of her power, but nobody could turn her down, either.

People owed Genevieve things. They owed her favors, and they owed her money. Sometimes, people owed her their lives, but that didn’t mean anything up here. Here in this room, all I knew was that I was about to face a horrible, monstrous beast.

That’s what Genevieve was.

A beast.

Now I realized why she wore that veil. I’d never met the woman Genevieve before, but there were rumors about her. I remember being a teenager in high school and sneaking up to her castle gates with my friends on a dare.

“That’s where it lives,” everyone had said.

It.

They hadn’t even called her a she.

People just thought of her as a creature, as a being. Nobody really cared about the fact that she probably had feelings, too. She probably had a human side. Did Genevieve have wishes? Hopes? Desires? I had no idea. Nobody did because everyone was too busy making up rumors about her to actually find anything out.

She'd been attacked long ago by a wild animal. It had torn up her face, scarring her. At least, that was the story I'd gotten from the old people in town. The younger people had different ideas. Some of them said she had fought with a lover. One person thought she'd been captured by a serial killer, yet managed to escape. Everyone had a different reason that she had a messed up face, and I felt like a total fool for not realizing she was the woman who had come into the bookstore.

If I had figured things out earlier, would my situation be different?

If I had figured out who she was, would I have acted in the same way?

Maybe, but maybe not.

It felt strange, really. Horrible. I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realized that I had mouthed off to the most hated woman in all the land. Why had my father become indebted to her?

Out of all the people he could have chosen to screw with, he'd chosen Genevieve.

He knew better.

"You fucked up," the man hissed to the woman. I had almost forgotten they were there. "You have to tell her."

"I know," she whispered. Then, she sighed. "Let's go."

Together, they left the room, and they closed the door behind them and hurried out of the room. I could hear their footsteps as they left.

Wait, why could I hear their footsteps?

I spun around and went to the door. I realized that they hadn't quite closed it completely. In fact, they'd shut it, but it hadn't quite latched.

"Fake," I whispered. There was no way it could be real. I stared at the door. Was this some sort of test? Was I supposed to stay in the room even though it was unlocked like a good little captive? I reached for the handle and pulled the door open. There was a staircase there. It was winding and led down into the depths of...what?

I didn't know.

If this person really was Genevieve, though, then I knew where I was. I was in her castle. It was called Castle Blood because everyone thought that she was some sort of vicious murderer, and I kind of thought there might be some truth to those rumors.

If I stayed in the castle room, then I knew what would happen. Those two servants would come back with food again, and they'd finally wear me down and convince me to eat. Then I'd be in the exact same place. I'd stare out that little window and just sit in the room, withering away. Eventually, they might come beat me or kill me. At least, once Genevieve was ready for me, they would.

If I left the room, though...

Well, anything could happen.

Yeah, I was going to take my chances with that one. I left the door open. I wasn't quite sure why. If I needed to hastily return, though, I didn't want to be stuck outside. What if I made it halfway down the stairs, saw that the servants were lying in wait, and then wanted to run back into the tower? I could pretend that I'd never left, that I'd been good.

Well, I wasn't good.

I was about to be very, very bad.

I sneaked quietly down the stairs. The staircase walls were made of stone, and they felt cool to the touch. This wasn't a medieval time jump, though: it was a modern castle. There were no torches or spiders crawling on the walls. Instead, the walls were lined with sconces that lit the area brightly. It was almost too bright. I could see the dirt on my body from wherever it was I'd been. Gross. I needed a shower in a bad way, and not just to wash the dirt off of my body. I wanted to wash the fucking dirt off my soul. After this, my life was never going to be the same, and it was a sad sort of realization.

The staircase seemed to stretch on forever, and I tried to focus on putting one foot in front of the other. The entire way down, I was careful. I kept pausing to listen for the two people, but I didn't hear anything. I heard nothing, in fact, and the silence was ominous, to say the least.

When I finally reached the bottom of the staircase, it opened into a large hallway that extended in either direction. I paused, waiting. Which way should I go? But then I heard voices coming from a room directly across from me. There was a big, heavy-looking door there, and even though I thought I should start running, I was about to let my curiosity get the best of me. I moved over, standing to the side of the door. It was ajar, and I peeked in. I wanted to know who was there, and what they had planned to do to me. Maybe I'd overhear them talking about my impending murder.

That wasn't what was happening, though. When I peeked inside, I had a clear view of the space, which was beautiful. It was decorated in a lovely fashion, and it was obvious that Genevieve had more money than I could possibly imagine. Everything looked expensive and beautiful from the paintings on the walls to the ornate flooring. There was a huge plush carpet, too, and it looked soft and welcoming.

There was a big fireplace with a fire going, and Genevieve was there with the two servants. The flames were going strong, and they cast shadows throughout the room. Still, I kept watching.

"She wouldn't eat anything?" Genevieve asked. The man was still holding the tray of food.

“Nothing, Mistress,” he said.

“Nothing,” the girl agreed.

Genevieve looked at them carefully. From where I was peering into the room, I could see all of them clearly. Genevieve was sitting on some sort of sofa, and the two servants were standing in front of her. Even from my position out in the hall, I could tell that they both looked very nervous. Was the Mistress going to kill them for their failure to feed me? Suddenly, I felt a little bad. Even though it technically wasn't my fault if Genevieve killed them, I disliked the idea that I could be sort-of responsible. It made me feel a little bit queasy.

“Dominique?” Genevieve asked. “Is there anything else?”

“Margaret has something to tell you,” the man said.

Margaret looked so nervous. She was practically shaking. She nodded, and her hair bobbed.

“I made a mistake,” she said.

Genevieve frowned.

“A mistake?”

“I accidentally...I used your name...when we were...well, I was trying to get her to eat!” Margaret was so exasperated that I felt like kind of a bitch for not eating, but hey, I didn't have to eat, right? I was a free person. Well, not really. Not anymore. Not if I couldn't find my way out of the castle. I was a captive of Genevieve, and if I didn't find my way out of the castle, she could force-feed me if she wanted to. I wouldn't be able to do a damn thing about it.

Genevieve set her teacup down on a side table and looked back at Margaret. Her eyes narrowed.

“Is that so?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“And you were there for this, Dominique?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“And did you reveal information to the girl?”

“No, Mistress.”

“Dominique, you may leave,” Genevieve said. “Take the food to the kitchen, and then resume your regular duties.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

I held my breath, ready to run away down the hall to find my freedom, but Dominique didn’t come near me. Instead, he turned and left through a back door in the room. As soon as he was gone, Margaret started crying.

“I’m so sorry, Mistress,” she said. “I know I should have known better, but I-“

“Strip.”

Margaret continued to cry as she took off her clothes. Bit-by-bit, her dress, bra, and panties all came off, and then she was standing in front of Genevieve completely naked, save for her shoes, which she left on. I felt a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. I couldn’t tell if it was arousal or dread. Margaret was wildly beautiful. She had perky breasts and her skin looked soft and pretty. The fact that she was crying didn’t bother me as much as it should. She was totally humiliated, and it reminded me of how I felt, too. My heart kind of went out to her a little bit.

“Tell me what is about to happen.”

“You’re going to punish me.”

“Why?”

“Because I was a bad girl.”

“How were you a bad girl?”

“I told the captive your name,” she said.

“And are you allowed to tell the captive any information about this place?”

“No, Mistress.”

“Margaret, you know I have to punish you.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Are you going to be a good girl and take your punishment?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Choose an implement,” Genevieve almost looked bored. An implement? What did that mean? I didn’t have to wait long to find out because Margaret went to a trunk that rested in a corner, and she opened it. She came back a moment later with what looked like a riding crop. My stomach felt heavy as I realized what was about to happen.

No, Genevieve wasn’t going to murder Margaret.

She was going to spank her.

I’d heard whispers about people who spanked each other as a method of punishment. I’d even read a few books about it, but doing so had always made me feel...well, rather funny. I wasn’t sure whether those were the types of things I should actually be reading, so I’d always put them away...after touching myself to the stories.

“Good choice,” Genevieve said, accepting the crop from Margaret. She nodded her approval. “If you had chosen something too light, I would have gone harder on you.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Margaret, you know I love seeing you like this,” Genevieve gestured to Margaret’s naked form.

“Yes, Mistress.”

“But I don’t want to punish you.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“If you had just been a good girl, I wouldn’t have to do this.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“On all fours,” Genevieve said. She was sitting on the sofa, which was turned so I could see the entire thing. I was facing one end of the sofa. Margaret knelt down on the floor so that she was on her hands and knees. Her face was toward the fireplace, away from me, but I could see Genevieve, and I could see Margaret’s bottom. Her legs were slightly spread, and I realized I could see more than just her bottom.

Her boots were still on, but Genevieve didn’t seem to notice or mind that.

“Tell me what’s going to happen.”

“You’re going to spank me,” Margaret’s words were almost a whisper.

“Tell me why.”

“I made a bad choice.”

“What was your choice?”

“I revealed information about you to your captive, and I did it without your permission.”

“Ten swats,” Genevieve said simply. “Count them out.”

She stood then and walked around Margaret, examining her. She kept her eyes firmly on Margaret, and I realized I was holding my breath as I

watched the scene unfolding before me. It was the most unusual and fascinating thing I'd ever seen. Part of me wanted to run away, but there was another part of me that wanted to see what was going to happen next.

I didn't have to wait long.

Genevieve hit Margaret's bottom hard with the crop. Margaret cried out. It was a strangled sort of cry, like she didn't want to be sharing her personal pain with the world.

"One," she said.

Genevieve hit her again in the same spot.

"Two."

Over and over, Genevieve spanked Margaret until the girl had reached the count of ten. When Genevieve finished, Margaret's bottom was bright red, and even from where I was watching, I could see her pussy glistening.

Was Margaret...aroused?

I realized that I was, too. My thighs were wet with my own body's response to watching the spanking. I'd never seen anything that was both horrifying and wildly erotic.

Genevieve helped Margaret to her feet, and she looked at her for a long moment.

"Good girl," Genevieve said. "You took your spanking very well."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Margaret didn't sound very happy about her spanking, nor about the compliment.

"Go upstairs and take a long, hot bath," Genevieve told her. "And then go to bed."

“But...my chores, ma’am...”

“Let me worry about that,” Genevieve said.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Margaret picked up her clothing, but didn’t redress herself. Instead, she turned and started to leave the room, but Genevieve called out to her.

“Oh, and Margaret?”

“Yes?”

“No touching yourself tonight.”

Margaret sighed and bit her lip. So, apparently, that was exactly what she’d been planning on doing in the bath.

“Yes, ma’am.”

She turned and left the room, carrying her garments with her. Genevieve watched as Margaret left out of the same door Dominique had left through earlier. I realized, then, that it was time for me to get going. I took a step backwards, and then another, but then I was shocked when I heard Genevieve laugh faintly.

She spun around, looking right at me, and raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, Eloise, leaving so soon?”

5.

Genevieve

So, the little bird had gotten out of her cage.

Interesting.

I should punish Dominique and Margaret both for that little mistake, but when Eloise realized she'd been spotted, she didn't run.

Strange.

I would have figured that she would take her shot with trying to get out of the front doors. She wouldn't be able to, of course. They were carefully locked, along with everything else of importance in the castle. Besides, it wasn't like my servants were going to let her out again.

"Come here, Eloise," I said. I stood, hands on hips, and watched as confusion and paranoia flitted over her face. She was conflicted. She didn't know whether she should run or stay. What was worse for her, I was certain, was that she didn't know what she wanted.

She'd been affected by the way I'd punished Margaret.

I could see it all over her face, and more than that: I could see it on her thighs. They were glistening with moisture. She liked watching Margaret's punishment. It had aroused her, and I was going to use that to my advantage.

"I have a limited amount of patience, Eloise," I said firmly. "And considering the fact that you've already left the tower without permission, I wouldn't push your luck."

That got her moving. She scurried over to stand in front of me. Her breasts bounced as she moved, and I waited until she was directly in front of me. She stood there, staring at me, but she didn't say anything. Not at first.

“You left the tower,” I said.

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Why?”

She looked up at me, confused.

“Because I want to go home.”

“You are home,” I said firmly.

She needed to realize this.

She needed to get it through that thick skull of hers. This was her home now. This was her place. She had nowhere else to be but here. Nothing else mattered except for staying here. She was mine. She was my property: my prize. She couldn't go home. Not ever.

“I mean...”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I want to see my father,” she whispered.

Now that surprised me. What the fuck did she want to see her father for? He was a piece of shit. He was truly, utterly, and wildly horrible. He was one of the sickest individuals I'd ever had the horror of meeting in my life, and I'd met some truly terrible people.

There were things Eloise didn't know about her dad. She didn't know that his gambling or addiction was the reason her mother had died. She didn't know that her mother's death had been preventable. She obviously didn't know her dad had such horrible issues. Apparently, she hadn't believed me when I'd told her that he was the reason she was here.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because he's my father.”

“Oh, love, he’s no father to you.”

She looked at me carefully, watching.

“He’s my father. Biologically, I’m his.”

“Oh, you might have come from his balls,” I conceded. “But that man has never loved another human in his life. He certainly doesn’t love you.”

Eloise fisted her hands, but she was self-controlled and wise enough not to try to strike me. That would have landed her over my knee, and then some. As it was, I already had a punishment to dole out to her, and we’d only just properly met.

“Eloise, you’re going to be here a long time,” I continued. “And you’re going to be doing a lot of obeying. You’re going to follow my orders, and you’re going to do so when I want you to. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, Mistress,” I corrected her. “Because that’s who I am. I’m your mistress.”

“Yes, Mistress,” she whispered.

Oh, the words sounded sweet on her tongue. I didn’t even care that she looked pissed off when she said them. She still said them. She was still listening, still obeying, and I was getting what I wanted.

I had a problem, though. She’d gotten out of the tower, and I wasn’t really inclined to backtrack. I didn’t want to put her back up there. Instead, I wanted to keep her with me. I wanted to play with her. I wanted to break her in.

Was she going to let me?

“Good,” I said. “Now come with me.”

I turned and started walking toward the back entrance to the room. Eloise just stood there. She looked back over her shoulder, and then back to me.

“Eloise?”

“You aren’t taking me back to the tower?” She asked.

“Do you want me to?”

“No.”

“Then come with me.”

She scurried up beside me, and I shook my head.

“Behind me.”

“What?”

“You walk behind me,” I told her. “Stay close. Don’t even think about running off, Eloise. All of the doors are unlockable only with a special code, and I guarantee that nobody here is going to help you out by telling you what it is.”

She didn’t say anything.

Instead, she followed me through the door and down a narrow hallway. It led throughout the castle. We passed the kitchen and a dining hall. We passed a couple of rooms that were used for entertaining. Finally, we came to a large, narrow stone staircase, and we started walking up it. She was nervous. I could tell by the way her breathing changed.

“Don’t panic,” I told her. “We aren’t going to a different tower.”

“Okay.”

When we reached the top of the stairs, we entered a proper hallway: one that was wide and open and had paintings lining either side. The East Wing of the castle was a beautiful place.

“This is where most of my guests stay,” I told her.

“Am I a guest?”

“No.”

“But I’ll be staying here.”

“For now,” I said.

Until I decided what to do with her.

I wasn’t about to put her in the servants’ quarters. I had no way to lock her in one of those rooms. My servants had all been with me for years and were well-trained. Aside from the occasional infraction, as had happened tonight, I rarely punished any of them. I definitely didn’t lock them away.

Eloise was different, though.

“Who else lives in this hallway?” She wanted to know.

“Nobody. I don’t have any guests right now.”

“Do you often have guests?”

“Let me clarify something for you,” I said as we walked along. She stayed behind me, as directed, but I could tell she was looking around, taking everything in.

“Okay.”

“Nobody here is going to help you escape.”

Silence.

“Nobody here is going to risk my wrath to help a girl whose cheap-ass father didn’t want her. I know that sounds harsh, but that’s the truth.”

I stopped walking and looked over at her. I was surprised to see a single tear sliding down her cheek. She was silently crying. I hadn't even heard.

How had she gotten good at that?

I didn't even want to know.

"Eloise, there's nothing wrong with crying," I said. She looked ashamed and embarrassed. I was serious, though. "Everyone needs to release their emotions sometimes."

Again, silence.

Well, apparently, I really was going to have my work cut out for me. I sighed. She was going to be difficult and petulant, and that was fine. I was ready to work hard to shape her into who I wanted her to be. She was going to be perfect, I knew, but it was going to take some dedication and some determination.

We reached a room about halfway down the hall. I would put her in my favorite room in this wing. Aside from the fact that it had a secret passageway that led directly to the west wing and my own private chambers, it was perhaps the most beautiful of the rooms.

I reached the doorway and turned to Eloise.

"This will be your bedroom," I told her.

"Are you going to lock me in?"

"Do you think you should be locked in?" I asked her. This room had a keypad that kept the door locked. You had to input a code whether you were coming or going, and that was the way I liked it. It ensured that this particular suite was always protected. I could easily lock someone in or out of the room.

"No," Eloise said.

"Are you really going to lie to me, darling?"

“No,” she said softly.

“Do you think you should be locked in?”

She didn’t speak out loud, but she nodded. The tears were falling harder and faster now, and I knew she was having a hard time accepting her new reality. It was unfortunate, really, that it had come to this.

“I can’t have you escaping.”

“I just want to go home,” she said.

She whispered the words so quietly that I almost didn’t hear, but I did. I sighed because I didn’t want to punish her for that. She was scared and she was tired. She was overwhelmed. I understood all of that.

“Let’s go inside,” I said. It was late. She’d been taken and brought to me only hours ago. It was nearly midnight. If she peeked outside of the tower window, she would have seen brightness because the grounds were well-lit, but that didn’t change the fact that it was the middle of the night. Her dinner had been ignored, but that was fine.

She could eat again tomorrow.

First, though, she needed a bath in a bad way. I led Eloise into the room and locked the door behind us. She gasped as she looked around the room, and I knew it was the most luxurious place she’d ever seen. I wasn’t an idiot. I knew exactly the type of place her father lived. I knew she was used to living in filth and poverty, but that was all about to change.

“First things first,” I told her. “You need to be cleaned.”

She looked down at herself, as though she was realizing for the first time that she was naked or that she was dirty.

“What happened to my clothes?”

“I had them burned,” I said. “They were destroyed by the time you got here.”

“Whoever captured me let me fall on the ground,” she whispered.

“I know.”

I was pissed at how she’d been delivered. Yes, she’d been taken, but the people transporting her had done a piss-poor job. I didn’t like the fact that they’d manhandled her. Oh, they hadn’t been inappropriate. They’d just been sloppy.

“Are you going to give me clean clothes?”

“No.”

“Then what?”

“To the bathroom, Eloise,” I gestured to a door on the other side of the room. I was slightly surprised that she walked right over and into the bathroom. She didn’t try to fight me. She didn’t throw herself at the door to the bedroom and try to get back to the hallway. She didn’t do any of that.

Instead, she just walked into the bathroom and waited patiently. I was suspicious of that, but I wasn’t going to let her know. She’d definitely try to run again at least once. I had to do what I could to keep her at the castle and to let her know that was completely unacceptable.

“What are you going to do to me?” She asked.

“I’m going to clean you up.”

I started the bath. I added some bubbles and a few drops of lavender. The bathroom was lovely with a full walk-in shower, as well as a huge tub. The bathtub itself was a Jacuzzi tub and big enough for at least four people. Eloise was only one person, though. She’d be able to swim if she wanted to.

As soon as the tub was full, I helped her climb inside. She sat there, not complaining.

“Have you taken many baths?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “We only have a shower at the house.”

“Close your eyes,” I said. “And relax your body.”

She still seemed so tense. I poured water over her body and took a washcloth so I could gently start washing her. To Eloise’s credit, she sat perfectly still as I washed her.

“You can take as many baths as you want while you’re here.”

“Okay.”

“Showers, too.”

“Understood.”

She was still tense, though. She might be acting a little bit agreeable, but her body told a story her mouth did not. She was scared. She was still thinking about ways she could try to escape. She was planning how she was going to make me feel safe with her, and then she’d let me down. She’d run. I could see it in her eyes.

Well, I’d have to beat her at her own game. She wasn’t going to play meek-and-quiet servant girl and think that was going to get me to forget who she was or where she’d come from. She had been given to me as payment, after all, and she was mine. It was messed up and it was slightly horrifying, but that was the way things were.

I pinched her nipple.

Hard.

“Ouch!” She shrieked, and then the mask was broken. It came down.

“You aren’t going anywhere.”

“Why the fuck did you pinch my nipple?”

There it was.

There was the girl she really was.

Part of me was delighted.

She was feisty and wild and crazy and wonderful, but she was also a huge brat. She'd need to be put in her place. She had to learn that I was the one in charge: not her. She needed to realize that being a brat had consequences. If pinching her nipple and holding onto it was what got her attention, then I'd do it.

"Manners," I said.

She bit her lip, but said nothing.

"Let me tell you something, Eloise. You're not the one in charge here. I am."

I pinched her nipple harder, twisting it just a little. She grimaced, but was smart enough not to say anything. It was horrible, watching her wiggle about in the bathwater. I wanted to slide into the water with her and touch her, kiss her. I wanted to touch her body and make her fall apart beneath my hands. I wanted to do so many different things, but I had to claim her obedience first.

I had to convince her that not only was I worthy of her submission, but that I was owed it.

"Apologize."

"I'm sorry," she said instantly.

"Tell me what you're apologizing for."

"I'm sorry I was rude."

"I think you're forgetting something."

"I'm sorry I was rude, Mistress," she whispered.

The last word sounded like heaven on her tongue. I'd been called Mistress plenty of times in my life, so why did it feel so different when Eloise was the one saying it? Why did hearing that word on her tongue feel so incredible? Words couldn't even begin to describe how nice it felt for her to call me that word.

I released her nipple, and I finished bathing her in silence. It took all of my strength not to lick her body when she stepped out of the tub. She was soaked, and covered with a few remaining bubbles.

"Stand still."

I knelt down and reached into the water. I drained the tub while she stood patiently waiting. She dripped onto the tiles, but I couldn't seem to bring myself to care. When I turned around, she was standing there, watching me, and I couldn't resist anymore.

I reached for her hips and brought her body forward. Her soft, shaved pussy brushed against my lips, and I kissed her there. She didn't resist. I reached my tongue out and flicked it against her skin, licking her.

A soft groan escaped from her lips.

"Such a pretty pussy," I murmured, sliding my tongue across her. I pulled away and looked up. She had her eyes closed and her head was back. She was enjoying it. She still had to be polite, though. She looked down, as though to see why I had stopped, and I raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, thank you, Mistress."

"Good girl."

She smiled, and I went back to licking her. I tasted her over and over until she was coming apart, bucking her hips against my face, and then I knelt back and looked up at her. She was lovely, really.

"See? Not everything about your stay will be bad."

"Mistress, that was amazing," she whispered.

“Good.”

I stood up. Reaching for a towel, I wrapped it around her. Then I cleaned up the little puddles of water on the floor and led Eloise back to the bedroom.

“Get into bed, Eloise.”

I took the towel from her and gestured for her to get into the bed. She stared at it awkwardly, nervously, and turned back to me.

“Mistress, I don’t want to sleep in the bed.”

“Complaining so soon after your orgasm? Wow, I suppose my skills must be slipping. Usually my submissives wait at least ten minutes before they start complaining or whining again.”

My good mood was soured. I didn’t want to deal with a petulant child. I definitely didn’t want to deal with someone who was going to be arguing with me. Not today.

“Mistress, I’m sorry,” she said. Her face paled, as though she realized she was not being the good girl I wanted her to be.

“Into the bed.”

She turned again and stared, and I realized I’d had enough. I grabbed her hair, fisting it, and I pushed her face first against the bed. She was bent over it with her feet still planted firmly on the ground, and I started spanking her ass.

Hard.

“Ouch!” She wriggled, trying to escape, but I held her hair tightly enough that she couldn’t do much.

“Eloise,” I said, spanking her ass hard. “I will not accept disobedience from you.”

“Please!”

I spanked her again. Over and over, I wailed on her ass until it was a bright pink. She started crying, and I finally stopped spanking her, and she dropped onto the bed, crying.

“You will receive great pleasure in this house, Eloise, but you will also receive great punishment if you choose not to obey. What you get is your decision. Do you understand?”

Silence.

Then, she spoke.

“Yes, Mistress.”

Her words were a tiny whisper, and I knew she felt completely humiliated and embarrassed. I was her captor, yet I’d both seen her come apart and cry in the same day.

“Go to sleep, Eloise.”

Then I left the room, and I locked the door.

6.

Eloise

I cried myself to sleep .

I was embarrassed about that. Who wouldn't be? What kind of person in their right mind sobs until they pass out? I wasn't a child, but apparently, I acted like one. The bed was soft, though, and wonderful, and I was horrified that I slept so damn well. I kind of felt like I should have slept poorly. After all, I was a prisoner now.

When I woke up, I tried not to think about the day before. What exactly had happened? So much had gone wrong. I had no idea what time it was or how long I'd slept. For all I knew, it was the middle of the afternoon.

I got out of bed and walked around the room for a minute. I looked for hidden cameras, but I didn't find any. Then again, I wasn't exactly sure what I was supposed to be looking for, either. The type of person who hid a camera in their captive's bedroom wasn't exactly going to be obvious about it.

Finally, I went into the bathroom. I found a toothbrush and toothpaste, so I brushed my teeth. Then I took a shower. I had been washed the night before by Genevieve, but I didn't like starting the day without a shower. Something about it woke me up and made me feel refreshed. Besides, after my orgasm the night before, there was no doubt I still smelled a little bit like sex.

After my shower, I went back into the bedroom and stared out of the window. It was big. It stretched almost the entire length of the room. I could see out into a set of gardens, but that was it. There was shrubbery and there were flowers, but I didn't see a road or a way out of here. Far off in the distance, there was a forest, but that was it.

Was my home beyond the forest?

I'd visited the Castle Blood as a teenager, but I hadn't been the one driving, and I definitely hadn't been paying attention to where we'd been going. My friends had driven, and together we'd sneaked up to the castle and tried to look inside. Of course, there hadn't been windows on the first floor that were easily accessible, so we'd failed. At the first strange noise we'd heard, we'd taken off.

Even then, people had known Genevieve was a monster of sorts.

She was ten years older than me, I knew. At my age, 35 seemed so old and mature. It seemed like a number that was so far off, but when she'd been touching me the night before, ten years hadn't felt like a big difference.

She'd played my body like a harp, and I'd loved every fucking second of it. It disgusted me and upset me. Then there had been the spanking. I hadn't known that I would like being spanked. In the moment, I hadn't. It had hurt. She hadn't held back, and I still felt a little sore from it, but there was more. I felt aroused and excited when I thought about how she'd pulled my hair back and spanked me.

I had enjoyed it.

And I kind of hated myself for that.

Finally, I pulled myself away from the window and started looking around the room. Was she going to make me stay naked? I didn't want to. I wanted clothes. At the very least, I wanted a bra. I went to the big dresser and looked through it, but I couldn't find anything. It was empty. Well, the bottom drawer held linens, but that was it.

With a sigh, I turned and walked to a bookshelf on the opposite side of the room. There were quite a few books, and I recognized several of the more recent titles. She had good taste in books, at least from what I could tell. Genevieve might be a monster, but at least she was a classy monster.

I picked up a couple of books and then set them back. I kept walking around the room, looking around. Someone was going to come check on me eventually, but before they did, I wanted to see exactly what the room held.

Unfortunately for me, it was quite normal-looking. There was the huge four-poster bed. There was a wardrobe and a separate dresser. There was a desk, and a bookshelf, and a couple of little tables. There was a sofa on one side of the room that faced a set of chairs. If I wanted to entertain guests, I'd be able to. I laughed coldly at the thought. Me? Guests? That was a lifetime ago.

I walked along the walls, examining the paintings that hung there. There were so many. One of them was especially big. It reached almost all the way to the floor. I stood in front of it, staring at it. The painting featured a huge mountain with rolling hills, and it was so lovely and beautiful. I closed my eyes and imagined that I was living in that painting.

What would I do with my freedom?

I'd always taken it for granted before, but what if I hadn't?

What if I really could go anywhere?

Do anything?

What would I do?

I reached out and touched the painting. It felt forbidden somehow, and a second later, when I felt a strange bump over one of the flowers, I knew why.

It was a button.

There was a fucking button built into the painting.

I pressed it to see what would happen, and to my utter shock, the painting seemed to come loose from the wall. I jumped back, but only one side was loose, and the painting swung open like a door. It didn't fall.

"What the fuck?" I whispered, stepping closer. It was a door. It was a secret door that led into a secret hall. Did Genevieve know about this? It was her castle, so she must know. I wasn't going to tell her that I knew, though. No way. I peered into the darkness of the hall. If I was going to escape through

there, I'd need some sort of flashlight or lantern. There were definitely flashlights here somewhere. I'd find one and then later, when no one was thinking about me or looking at me, I'd escape.

I closed the painting and walked over to the bed, and I sat down. I tried to look as natural as possible. I knew that soon, she would come for me, and I didn't want her to know that I knew about this secret.

I didn't want her to know I had hope that I'd manage to escape.



WHEN MARGARET CAME into the room with my breakfast, I was sitting on the bed staring at a book. I wasn't actually reading. It was much too hard to focus. Although I felt like I should make the most of my time and read when I could, I still couldn't bring myself to do it.

"Good morning," she said. "I hope you slept well."

She didn't make eye contact. Instead, she set the tray of food down on the little table that was in front of the sofa.

"I did. Thanks."

I didn't make eye contact, either. I knew she was probably pissed about her spanking. Probably, she blamed me. It wasn't my fault, though. She'd slipped up all on her own. I felt a little bad about getting her in trouble even though realistically, I knew that it wasn't my fault. She had known the rules of her house. I didn't. I couldn't be the one to blame.

Still, when I looked over at her, she looked sad.

"I'm sorry," I found myself saying.

Her head shot up.

"For what?"

“Getting you in trouble,” I said. “I wouldn’t have told on you, though.”

Not like Dominique had.

Margaret, apparently, didn’t know that I knew about her spanking. She didn’t say anything for a minute. She just stared at me. Finally, she nodded.

“There are rules around here,” she said. “I shouldn’t have broken them.”

“Seems like there are a lot of rules.”

“There are.”

“Are you like me?”

“A woman?”

“A captive,” I whispered.

“Don’t say that,” Margaret looked around sharply. Who was she looking for? Genevieve? Or Dominique? Their relationship was so weird and strange. I didn’t quite understand it. Then again, I guessed I didn’t really need to. It seemed like Genevieve was the kind of superior who ran her castle and her business the way she wanted to. She had servants, yes, but I had the feeling that some of them, like Margaret, might also be lovers.

“Are you lovers?” I asked boldly. It was such a rude, horrible question. It was none of my business at all. I wasn’t even sure why I was asking or why it mattered. When Genevieve touched me after my bath, I’d come apart for her. It was humiliating. I had been so easy.

When you think about things like being kidnapped or forced into sex, it’s easy to think you’ll resist. I certainly did. I didn’t think I’d go down without a fight. Yet I had.

“No,” Margaret said without hesitation.

“But do you sleep together?”

She cocked her head and looked at me.

“Do you like her?”

“I hate her.”

“Doesn’t seem like it. Seems like you’re jealous.”

It did seem that way, didn’t it?

Instead of answering, I looked over at the food Margaret had brought. It was bacon and eggs and toast and all sorts of other wonderful things.

“Thanks for breakfast.”

“Of course.”

“I’m allowed to eat, then?”

“Yes.”

“And clothes?”

“No clothes.”

“Why not?”

“She wants you submissive and naked. When people are naked, they’re more uncomfortable and they’re more compliant.”

“So clothing is like, I don’t know, a safety net?”

“Pretty much.”

“All right.”

I went over to the couch, reached for the food, and started eating. Margaret stood exactly where she was and watched. She kept her eyes moving between me and the bedroom door.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I won’t escape again.”

“You got out last night.”

“Your dumbass helper didn’t lock the door.”

“Dominique?”

“Yes.”

I wondered if he’d been punished. Margaret didn’t say anything about it, and I didn’t force myself to ask. I didn’t really want to know if Genevieve had slept with him or not.

“You watched my punishment,” Margaret finally said.

“Yes.”

“Did she spank you, too?”

“Yes.”

“Did you like it?”

I looked up at her. That was a question I hadn’t been expecting. Had I? Absolutely, I had. I was ashamed of it, though. I was embarrassed and humiliated. I wasn’t supposed to like being spanked by someone like Genevieve. I wasn’t supposed to like being forced into having an orgasm. Being locked up wasn’t how I was supposed to spend my life.

Then again, things don’t always turn out the way we expect them to.

“I don’t know,” I lied.

Margaret stared at me. She gestured for me to keep eating, so I did.

“Let me fill you in on a few things you should know. These aren’t secrets. I was told to tell you.”

“I’m listening.”

“First of all, you’ll be naked until the mistress decides you’ve earned clothes.”

“Okay.”

“You’ll eat your meals in here for today. Starting tomorrow, you’ll be joining her at the dinner table.”

“Understood.”

“You’ll get to dress for dinner as long as you’re good. Trust me, you’re going to want to be good. Sometimes there are dinner guests. You don’t really want some of the crazy guys seeing you naked.”

“Understood, again.”

“Each day, you’ll have to exercise and do some reading.”

“Exercise?”

“Yeah, I’ll take you to the workout room, or we can jog outside.”

I looked down at myself. My breasts were small, but I wasn’t sure if I was expected to exercise without some sort of sports bra. As if understanding, Margaret shook her head.

“You’ll have fitness clothing. She might be a bitch, but she doesn’t want you ruining your body.”

“Are you allowed to say that?”

“No.”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I won’t tell.”

“Good,” Margaret nodded. “You’re learning. Now finish your breakfast so I can leave.”

“How long have you been here?” I asked her.

“Long enough to know that you’re stalling.”

I ignored her and finished scarfing down the rest of my food. I wasn’t exactly happy about the way the conversation had turned, but it wasn’t like I could do anything about it. Margaret took the empty plates and the water glass, and she left the room without another word. I waited at the door for a minute. Once I was sure she was gone, I turned the handle to see if it would open. I heard a sigh from the other side of the door.

“Seriously? Stop trying to leave.”

Then I heard her footsteps. Well, fuck. Apparently, she wasn’t going to make the mistake of not locking me up a second time. Whatever. It wasn’t like I couldn’t be patient. I could. I could wait for the right moment, and then make my escape.

Until then, I had a bookcase full of books to read, so I grabbed one, settled on the couch, and started reading. I managed to make it halfway through a novel by the time Margaret arrived with lunch. Again, she stood quietly by while I ate. For that meal, she didn’t speak at all. I finish quickly, and then she left again.

It was strange to have an entire day to myself with no responsibilities. The only thing I had to worry about was staying put, and that wasn’t exactly difficult since I was locked in.

Well, not entirely.

I knew about the painting, after all.

The day passed easily, and soon it was time for dinner. Margaret appeared once more with food, and this time, I didn’t eat right away. I’d realized something.

“She’s not coming to see me today, is she?” I asked.

“What?”

“Genevieve.”

“You need to speak properly. Even if you think we’re alone, always use her correct title,” Margaret corrected me. She glanced around.

“Are there cameras in here?”

“I’m not at liberty to discuss that.”

So that meant yes, but I hadn’t found any. Were there? I wasn’t sure. I’d looked, but I hadn’t seen any hidden cameras. Genevieve did seem like the kind of person who might spy on her guests, but then again, maybe not.

“All right,” I conceded. “Mistress Genevieve, then.”

“What about her?”

“She’s not coming today.”

“She cannot come today. Please, eat your food.”

“Where did she go?”

“Food.”

“Hey, I’m talking to you,” I reached for Margaret’s arm, and she jumped back, surprised.

“Please don’t touch me,” she said quickly. She seemed embarrassed and uncomfortable, and I felt a little bad for reaching out like that. Had I become such an animal overnight? Back in the village, I never would have just grabbed a stranger. It was wildly rude. Just one day as a captive, though, and I’d gone feral.

“I am so sorry,” I said. “I didn’t mean to be rude.”

Embarrassed, I quickly sat down and started eating my dinner. Soon it was gone, and Margaret took my plate. She got up and started to leave the room, but she stopped at the door.

“A word of advice,” she said.

“Okay.”

“Listen to the mistress. Life will be much easier for you, and much more pleasant, if you do.”

7.

Eloise

The next day, Genevieve woke me up early with a soft kiss on my cheek. Her veil was pushed up, but when my eyes fluttered open, I still couldn't see her face: just her lips. Even when she'd gone down on me, she'd kept the veil on. She'd only lifted it just enough to reveal her mouth. As soon as I'd come apart for her, she'd lowered it back down.

I looked at her, trying to get a better look, but as soon as my eyes were open, she pulled back.

"Good morning," she said gently.

"Good morning, Mistress."

She smiled at my greeting.

"You remembered your manners," she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

I understood what she wanted from me. I knew she wanted someone who was sweet and submissive. If that was what she wanted, then that was what I would offer her. I didn't have to believe it. I didn't have to agree with it. I'd do it, though. If that was what it took to get out of the damn castle and get back to my dad, then I'd do whatever she thought I should. I could be her own personal dancing monkey, and it wouldn't matter. I just had to keep surviving. I had to give her everything that she wanted.

"How was your day yesterday?" She asked me carefully.

"You weren't here," I said. I knew that my tone held a hint of accusation. Part of me believed that since she was the one who had wanted me so badly, that she should be the one who watched over me.

“I had business to attend to.” Genevieve answered curtly, as though she couldn’t be bothered to explain anything other than what she already had. I knew she was a busy woman, but I had missed her. Was that wrong? Probably. We weren’t supposed to be close. I wasn’t supposed to crave her attention. I couldn’t tell whether I actually liked her, or whether I was clinging to her because she was the only person who had shown me affection.

“I missed you.”

I had the feeling she was a little surprised by that. She looked at me, watching me.

“Did you?”

“Yes.”

It was embarrassing to admit out loud, really.

“What did you do?”

“I sat in my room,” I told her honestly. “Margaret brought me food. She was very kind to me.”

“I hope she was kind in a polite way,” Genevieve said.

Was she...jealous?

I detected just a hint of concern in her voice. I couldn’t see her face clearly, so I wasn’t sure if there was more to it than that.

“She was very polite,” I said, agreeing with Genevieve. “She didn’t do anything to me, if that’s what you mean.”

“Margaret knows better than to touch what’s mine,” Genevieve said. “Besides, if she did try to touch you, her punishment would be far worse than just a simple spanking.”

“I understand, Mistress.”

“Get up,” she said. “And get dressed.”

“Dressed?”

It was then that I noticed a set of clothing at the foot of the bed. I looked at it, and then back at her expectantly. Was she serious? It almost felt too good to hope for. I’d only been naked for two days, but it felt like a lifetime. I was more than ready to get dressed and be able to cover my body from the watchful eyes of...everyone.

“Yes.”

I didn’t have to be told twice. I hopped up and pulled on the bra, panties, yoga pants, and tank top. There was a ponytail holder, too, and I pulled my hair back into a sloppy, messy bun. I looked over at her.

“There are socks and sneakers, too,” she said.

“We’re working out?”

“We’re working out.”

I finished putting the socks and shoes on, and I followed Genevieve down the hall. I was excited to be out of my bedroom. It was a strange sort of excitement, though. It felt like it was something that I shouldn’t actually be happy about. I worried that I was already becoming too used to this place, and it had hardly been any time at all.

What was I going to be like if I was here for a week?

A month?

Longer?

Would I eventually get excited at the prospect of seeing Genevieve? Already, it felt nice to see her. It felt better than yesterday, when I had basically felt abandoned. How messed up was that? I’d felt abandoned by my captor.

I knew it was a psychological thing. It was emotional, and it was physical. I was drawn to Genevieve. She was wildly attractive to me, and I felt like she knew it. I thought she was evil, and bad, and naughty. She was still gorgeous, though. That was a problem.

You weren't supposed to be attracted to villains. You weren't supposed to meet someone attractive and beautiful and think, "Oh, they're totally evil but also really hot."

Bad people were supposed to be ugly.

She wasn't.

We reached the end of the hall and she stopped in front of a door.

"This is the workout room," she said. "You'll come here every morning for exercise."

"Every morning?"

"Yes."

"Will you bring me?"

"No."

I looked at her expectantly.

"You're being kept in your room under close supervision," she said. "For now, Margaret can bring you here each day. You'll be able to walk around the castle with her by your side. You can go anywhere you like."

That seemed...unimaginable. Okay, so I'd have a babysitter. My chances of escaping with Margaret close to me were very slim. Margaret didn't trust me, and for good reason. I had been brought to the castle against my own will. Obviously, I was going to want to escape from the castle.

"Anywhere?" I asked, still not quite believing it.

“Except the west wing,” she said. “You must never go there.” She pressed the code to enter the workout room. Like the other rooms, it had a little keypad with a password. One of these days, I’d have to figure out what those were.

“What’s in the west wing?” I asked.

“It doesn’t matter. You have the rest of the castle to explore. I’m sure you’ll enjoy seeing all of the different places you can go.”

“But the west wing,” I tried again.

“It’s forbidden,” Genevieve snapped. She turned around and grabbed my chin, squeezing it tightly. She tilted my chin up so I was facing her, and I couldn’t look away. “Do not ask me about it again.”

“Yes, Mistress,” I managed to squeeze out the words, and she released her grip on my chin.

Anxious and tired, I reached for my chin and rubbed it, trying to get the tension out.

“Now, then, where were we?” She asked, looking around. “Ah, yes. Your workout.” She pointed to the different pieces of equipment. “You’ll come here each day. I’ll have a workout plan prepared for you. You’ll train five days a week.”

“What do I need to train for?”

“Your health,” she said simply.

I looked down at myself. I might have been a bit too scrawny, but I’d never been described as unhealthy. It was just that sometimes I forgot to eat. Other times, food didn’t seem too appealing to me. Besides, all of our expendable money went to my father’s bills and medications. I didn’t have a lot of free money to play with.

If what Genevieve had told me about him was true, then all of that money had basically been wasted. He’d washed it away. He’d tossed it out. I could

have been eating nice, gourmet, healthy meals for years, but I'd been giving everything I made to help my father out.

I felt like a complete fool.

"What's wrong with my body?" I asked.

Again, Genevieve grabbed my chin. She tilted it up toward herself.

"There is nothing wrong with you," she said. "You are perfect."

I'd never had anyone tell me that before. I'd definitely never had anyone tell me in such a dominating and bossy way. Perfect? Really? Was that what she thought of me? She thought I was perfect? The idea that someone as incredibly rich, powerful, and well-known as Genevieve could think that I was perfect was slightly overwhelming.

It also seemed impossible.

"But you still need to exercise. Everyone does. You'll eat healthy meals here. You'll work out. You'll rest a lot. Your father didn't take very good care of you, Eloise, but I take care of everything that's mine. Do you understand?"

Hers.

She was saying that I was hers.

"Yes, Mistress."

I did understand.

It was a little bit strange, really, to think that I belonged to her. In a strange sort of sense, I didn't think I'd ever belonged to anyone before. Oh, I'd lived with my dad, and he'd been my parent, but belonging?

It always seemed like I'd lived with my dad. We'd been more like roommates than anything else. I hadn't really felt affection for him, and he

certainly hadn't promised to protect me or take care of me. Not the way Genevieve was promising.

She walked me through my workout. I noticed that she didn't work out with me, but she still seemed very fit. As if reading my mind, she spoke.

"I work out alone," she said.

"Okay."

I hadn't asked, but it explained a lot.

"I prefer to work out without the veil, and nobody sees me without the veil," she said. It was the most personal thing she'd ever told me, and I wasn't about to press my luck on that front. Instead of asking why she needed the veil, or why it was so important to her, I just nodded.

"Yes, Mistress," I said. Then I climbed onto the treadmill, and I started to run.



AS IT TURNED OUT, THE no-clothes rule had a lot of exceptions. I was allowed to wear clothing while exercising, and I was allowed to have things on at supper. I was given a beautiful pink dress to wear to dinner, and Margaret helped me put it on. Then she assisted me with styling my hair and putting on just the faintest amount of makeup.

"Perfect," she said, examining her handiwork.

"Thank you."

Margaret led me to the dining hall, which really was like this huge sort of banquet room. The table stretched the entire length of the room, and it was big enough to hold at least 40 guests. Genevieve was already seated at one end of the table, and she rose when I stood.

"Go to her," Margaret said, pushing me forward.

I needed the nudge to get myself moving, so I started walking. I moved as quickly as I could, which wasn't very fast. The dress was easy enough to move in, but I was still nervous. Genevieve made me feel a lot of different emotions that I wasn't ready for. She made me feel sexy and alive and scared. She made me feel uncomfortable, but always in ways that made me even more aroused. It was strange, really, but I thought I was beginning to enjoy it.

"You look beautiful," Genevieve said when I reached her.

"Thank you, Mistress."

I heard the doors to the dining room close, and I realized that Margaret had left. There was already food on the table, so I knew we were going to be alone. Should I be worried about enjoying a meal alone with the beautiful beast who had captured me?

Maybe.

Maybe not.

Genevieve reached for me and pulled me close. She kissed me, placing her hands first on my waist, and then she moved them up. She cupped my breasts over the soft pink fabric as she touched me, and then she placed her hands on each of my cheeks as she deepened the kiss.

The way she kissed me was electric. Nobody had ever kissed me like that before, and I suspected that nobody ever would again. She had somehow managed to awaken so many parts of me that I didn't know existed: that I thought had long ago died.

"You look beautiful," she whispered. Although she'd already said the words once again, the second time felt different. It felt less polite. It felt more like a whispered promise.

"Thank you, Mistress," I said again.

“Do you like the dress?” She asked me, carefully running her fingers down the sides of the gown. It really was lovely: all lacy and fancy. I’d never worn anything like it before.

“Yes,” I told her honestly.

“Good,” she nodded. “Now take it off.”

“Mistress?” I asked, confused.

“Eloise, I allowed you to wear the dress and cover yourself on the way to the dining room. Now, I’d like to look at you as we share a meal. Do you have any problems with this?” She still had her veil on, but I imagined she was raising her eyebrow.

“No, Mistress,” I said. “No problem.”

I turned around, and she unbuttoned the back of the dress. Then I turned back and slipped it off. She watched as the dress fell from my shoulders onto the floor. Then I bent over, picked it up, and set it carefully on one of the unused chairs.

“Beautiful,” she said. “Turn around so I can look at you.” She waved her finger, indicating that I should spin in a circle. It reminded me of the way that a bride spun around in her new dress so all of her friends could see the gown.

I moved, very aware of the fact that her eyes were on me, and I blushed when I finished my spin and she nodded in approval.

“Well then,” she said. “Let’s eat.”

We sat down, and I realized it didn’t matter that I was naked because the chair was covered with velvet. It felt soft and wonderful against my skin.

“I designed the furniture myself,” Genevieve told me.

“Really?”

“Yes,” she said. “Once upon a time, I loved projects like this.”

“You’re very talented,” I said. I was impressed. Most people couldn’t even draw or paint. Here Genevieve had designed an entire dining set.

“There’s no such thing as talent,” she shrugged.

“What do you mean?”

“Anyone who is viewed as talented simply worked hard,” she explained. She reached for her fork and started eating. I glanced at my food as she spoke, but it all looked so good. There was baked chicken, mashed potatoes, and steamed broccoli. My drink looked like it was wine, and when I reached for the glass and sipped at it, I was delighted to find out that it was. It felt good, and it warmed my body.

“I guess that makes sense,” I told her. “A lot of people view the world in black and white. They think people are either born talented or they aren’t, but they don’t see the hours that go into practicing something you love.”

“Exactly,” Genevieve nodded. She had her veil pushed up to her nose. She was eating, but there was no way it was easy for her.

“Mistress?” I asked.

“Yes, Eloise?”

“Do you want to...I mean...not that I’d force you to, but...”

“Spit it out, Eloise.”

“Would you like to take the veil off?” I whispered. I felt, even as I offered the suggestion, that it was the wrong thing to say. “It might be more comfortable for you. I don’t have to look, you know.”

She tensed. For a moment, I thought she was going to yell at me or hit me. She gripped her fork so hard I thought it might break, but then she just jerked her head slightly.

“This is not open for negotiation,” she said firmly.

“Yes, Mistress,” I realized that I’d completely destroyed the gentle ambiance of the supper, so we finished eating in awkward silence. When we were done, we sat there for a few minutes sipping our wine. No one had reappeared to take away the plates, but Genevieve didn’t seem to mind. I definitely didn’t mind. I didn’t want Margaret spending even more time looking at me naked. Pretty soon the other people in this house were going to know my body better than I knew it myself.

“Eloise,” she said, setting the wine glass down. “It’s time for dessert.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Do you enjoy dessert?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Me too,” she said.

“Now get on the table.”

“Mistress?”

Genevieve only chuckled. She stood up and pulled my chair out. She offered me her hand and pulled me to my feet. Then she led me down to the very center of the table. There were no plates or glasses or centerpieces at the part of the table. It was definitely wide enough for a person, and she helped me climb up there. I sat facing her with my legs dangling off the side of the table, nervous for what was going to come next.

Genevieve grabbed a chair and pulled it up beside the table. She sat and scooted between my legs, so she was facing my pussy.

“I like dessert a lot,” she said. “And tonight, you’re what’s on the menu.”

Genevieve reached for my legs and lifted them, so they were dangling over her shoulders. I was flat on my back, but wildly exposed to her gaze.

“Close your eyes,” she whispered. I heard a rustle, and I wondered if she was taking off her veil for this. Maybe that should make me nervous. Perhaps it should make me excited. I wasn’t sure.

I felt her hands on my legs first, followed by her lips. She kissed from my knees to my upper thigh, but she didn’t touch me where I wanted it most. Not just yet. She seemed quite content to take her time teasing and playing with me. My body ached for more, but I did my best to hold perfectly still.

Despite being heralded as a monster, Genevieve seemed like anything but. In this moment, she seemed like the perfect lover: gentle, sweet, tender. She kissed me over and over again, and soon I felt my body fully relaxed.

I didn’t worry about being so exposed to her. She’d seen me before. I felt the rush of cool air over my skin and she blew gently on me, and then she kissed me more.

“You’re getting wet, Eloise,” she murmured.

“Yes, Mistress.”

“You’re enjoying this.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Tell me what you want me to do next, Eloise.”

I bit my lip. Here was the hard part. I could lie here and accept what she was offering me. That bit was easy. Being teased a little wasn’t really a big deal, now was it?

Being essentially tortured, though? That was the hard part. That’s what she was doing. She was sexually torturing me, teasing me. She was making me ache and hurt and want her, and the real question was whether I was going to give in to her or not.

“Please,” I whispered.

“Please what, Eloise?”

“Please lick my pussy, Mistress,” I blurted the words out, hating myself even as I said them. It sounded so crass and wild and untamed, but it really was what I wanted. I wanted to feel her warm mouth on me, and I wanted her to taste me. I was so close that every part of me was aching, and she hadn’t even really started yet.

She only chuckled. She loved this. She loved making me beg. I realized I needed to quickly get over my nervousness surrounding sex because there was going to be a lot of it in a lot of different ways. I was going to need to stop panicking just because she wanted to hear me say what I wanted.

That was one of her kinks, I realized. She liked being asked in very specific ways, and she liked making me squirm.

“Mistress, please,” I whispered.

“So polite,” she murmured, pressing her lips to my body. She was getting closer to my core. She was carefully, slowly moving closer to where I wanted her to touch me. “I like your good manners, Eloise,” she whispered.

“Please lick me,” I said. “I want it. I want you.”

I was losing my mind.

I could tell exactly how wet I already was, and I knew that she could see, smell, and taste my arousal. She could feel it. She could have her senses completely overwhelmed by me if she wanted to, and oh, I wanted that.

“Please,” I said again.

Finally, she seemed to take mercy on me, and she pressed her mouth to my pussy and started to lick me. Genevieve must have been trained by the goddesses of the stars because she was incredible. She had barely touched me when I started to feel the first wave of an orgasm threatening to come over me, but she seemed to sense it, too. She pulled back.

“No!” I cried out.

She only chuckled.

“Patience,” she whispered.

She teased me like that, over and over again. She would slide her tongue over my clit, swirling it around, and then pull back before I could come. Soon I was close to tears, begging her to please let me come apart. That was what I wanted. I didn’t care that I was so exposed to her. I didn’t care that I was naked on a dining room table. I didn’t care about anything except getting off, and soon, I felt her touch me once more.

“You’ve pleased me,” she whispered. “You’re better than I could have imagined. All right, my sweet Eloise, it’s time.”

She licked me again, and that time, she didn’t stop until I had come. The orgasm that swept over me wreaked havoc on my body, I knew I was crying out loudly as I came. I just didn’t care. I didn’t care who knew it. I didn’t care about anything except the fact that was happening. I was falling apart for Genevieve, and she was pleased with me.

That realization sent a warm, fuzzy feeling throughout my body, and I closed my eyes to stop from crying at the knowledge that I was starting to really like Genevieve. I didn’t think I was supposed to like her. I definitely wasn’t supposed to be attracted to her, but I was.

“Mistress?” I whispered.

“Yes, Eloise?”

“Thank you,” I said.

“It was my pleasure,” she said.

She stood up, and I realized that the veil was back down. She was still dressed, and as I propped myself up to look at her, I suddenly got the impression that our time together was over.

“Mistress? Can I...”

How was I supposed to ask?

I wanted to touch her.

I wanted to play with her.

I wanted to offer Genevieve the same pleasure she'd given to me, but she suddenly didn't seem interested in that.

"Not today, pet," she said. "Come. Let's get you dressed and back to your room. It's late, and it's past your bedtime."

Realizing that it would be better to obey than to argue, I simply nodded. I was disappointed, but it didn't seem like she was going to budge on this. Genevieve wanted to keep things the way they were. I was her toy, I realized. I was her plaything. I needed to keep myself in check. I couldn't let myself fall for her because this was just an exchange of sorts. I was her victim and she...

She was heaven.

8.

Genevieve

She was perfect.

Everything about her was incredible.

The way she kissed me was everything I'd ever hoped for. The way she came apart beneath my hands made me feel like I was freefalling. When Eloise's father, Peter, had given her to me as payment for his debts, I thought that he was being insane. I didn't realize just how truly horrible he was until I started getting to know her.

After the first few days together, things started to stabilize around the castle. She learned the rules and the way things were run, and then our lives settled into a strange sort of normalcy. Eloise developed a routine for how she wanted to spend her days, and I could focus on work while Margaret looked after her. I wasn't worried about Margaret trying to steal away Eloise's affection. On the contrary, Margaret only seemed to have eyes for Dominique.

A few days passed. Each night, we'd have dinner together. We'd always finish with dessert in the same way. After, I'd bring her back to her bedroom and I'd sit beside her bed. It was so hard to keep my hands off of her that most of the time, I didn't, but she didn't seem to mind. She seemed to enjoy the playtimes we shared.

I'd always kiss her goodnight, and I'd read her a story or talk to her for a little while, but then I'd leave her alone. She was adjusting to life in the castle, and that was the way I wanted it. I didn't want her to have to have me near so she could fall asleep. I wanted her to go to bed on her own. In some ways, it felt like training a new kitten. I had to teach her to trust me, but I also needed her to know that she had to self-soothe once in awhile.

If she could get used to the way things were, then she'd want to stay. That was my hope, anyway. I was hanging onto the idea that if she could become

comfortable here, that she'd want to stay. I had an idea that she would somehow come to learn to like the castle. That was how my other staff members had felt. Margaret and Dominique had both been with me for years. There were other people, too. Helen, my cook, for example, wasn't about to go anywhere. I had security people who came with me to collect on debts owed to me.

Mostly, though, I was alone. I spent much of my time on the computer or making phone calls. Sometimes I would hold private business meetings. I did a lot of different things that didn't involve building a relationship of my own. Even if I did have time for something like that, I didn't hold false hope that I'd somehow find someone who was okay with my line of work.

After all, I was, in many ways, a villain.

It was a strange sort of thought, really. Everyone always wanted to think of themselves as a hero. In the eyes of many, though, I was the bad girl. I was the one people feared. I was the one who, when they looked back at their lives, they'd point at. They'd say I ruined them.

The truth was that I never ruined anyone who wasn't already broken.

It had been almost a week since Eloise came to stay at the castle when I took her on a walk outside. The air was a little bit chilly, and I'd chosen a long skirt with a red sweater for her to wear. Although she was allowed to wear clothing while exercising or walking around the castle, I made sure she was always naked in her room. The more that she was naked, the more comfortable she'd be with her body.

The more comfortable she'd be with me, too.

"So, these are the gardens," she said.

"Do you like them?"

"I feel like I've got them memorized," she told me. "I can see them from my window, and I spend a lot of time looking at them."

The gardens were something I was proud of. I'd designed the space myself, and even though I relied on my gardeners for maintenance, the aesthetic was something I'd come up with on my own. There were hedges, including some wonderful hedge sculptures. There were daisies and lilies and roses. There was one plant in particular that I loved more than anything else: a chrysanthemum in the center of the garden.

"Only one ever grows," I said, showing Eloise.

"Only one?"

"Yes."

"Strange," she said. "But pretty."

She reached out and touched the petals of the flower. Then she looked over at me.

"I'm sorry, I didn't ask," she said.

"It's quite all right."

She hadn't asked, but it was okay. I was all right sharing because it was with her. If anyone else tried to touch this particular flower – or worse, to pick it – then I would freak out. With Eloise, though, I felt a connection that I knew was dangerous. I was starting to like her a lot more than I had planned on liking her.

I needed to stop. I needed to remember that she was just some girl.

She was no one special.

Even as I thought it, though, I knew that wasn't true. She was wildly special. I knew she'd been reading the books that were in her room, and I'd been quietly collecting more to place on her shelves. Margaret even noticed how much Eloise liked to read, and the two of us together were trying to plan which stories Eloise ought to read next.

“The gardens are pretty, though,” Eloise continued. We kept walking through the space, exploring the different areas.

“I created it,” I said.

“I figured.”

“I mean, I designed it,” I clarified. “Just like with the dining room set.”

“Really? You didn’t hire someone?”

I shook my head. It was something that I was proud of, and I didn’t feel proud of very many things in my life. There were a few things I’d managed to make all on my own, and those were things I was happy to brag about even just a little. Eloise seemed please that I was sharing with her, and that made me happy, too.

“That’s pretty nice,” she said. “I don’t think I’m creative enough to ever do anything like that.”

“Don’t sell yourself short,” I said.

Eloise looked at me carefully. She cocked her head in the way she did when she was ready to ask a question, and I knew something was coming.

I also knew I probably wasn’t going to like what she wanted to know.

“Why do you always wear that veil on your face?” She asked. I had known it was coming. She’d mentioned me taking off the veil a few times, but she’d never pushed me. She’d seemed to sense, somehow, that it wasn’t something I was ready to talk about, and she’d been okay with that, at least until now. Now, it seemed, sweet Eloise had grown comfortable enough to ask the question straight out.

“Is that important?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because it seems like it’s so much of who you are.”

She was observant, for someone who was ten years my junior. Not a lot got past Eloise. Oh, sure, her father had tricked her, but people were hard to read when you were too close to them. Having some distance meant a lot of things. When you had some space from someone, you were able to see things a little more clearly.

Maybe what she needed was time, at least when it came to him. Right now, though, she’d asked me a question. It was one I didn’t really want to answer.

“That’s not any of your business,” I told her.

“But I want to know.” Eloise stopped walking and turned. She looked at me carefully. Despite wearing the veil to cover myself, I could see her clearly, and I knew that look. She wasn’t going to let this go.

“Watch yourself,” I said.

“Or what? You’ll spank me?”

“Yes.”

She bit her bottom lip and looked away. Interesting. She didn’t look scared, now did she? No. On the contrary, she looked...

Well, she looked aroused. She looked delighted, really. How interesting. Although I had dared to hope just a little that Eloise might be excited or interested in some of the things I was, I hadn’t actually expected her to.

As far as I knew, she had no prior experience with BDSM or with domination. It didn’t seem like she had anything that made her excited or wild. When she heard me mentioned spanking, though, her eyes lit up.

Could sweet Eloise have a secret desire for submission? She’d done a wonderful job obeying me in the orders I’d given her, but she’d never indicated that it was anything than obedience to stay alive. Even the nightly desserts we shared, with me licking her until she came apart, were things

that I wanted. They were things I craved. I wondered, now, if she looked forward to those moments just as much as I did.

I'd have to explore that later. First, I had to decide how much I was going to tell her. The truth was that I rarely talked about my past. I had my reasons for that, but I also knew she wasn't likely to stop asking. We were going to be together for a long time, I hoped, and eventually, I might want to share with her. Would it be so horrible to share now?

"I feel it necessary to remind you that I'm the one in charge."

She looked at me, and for a second, I thought she was going to argue, but Eloise didn't. Instead, she nodded.

"Yes, Mistress," she said. Then she reached for my hand and held it. "I'm sorry for being too intrusive."

We walked together in silence for a little while. I thought about the way she had reached for me. I liked it. I thought it showed that she was interested in me, and that she wasn't simply placating me. Perhaps she was playing me, but I didn't think so. I liked the way that she was interacting with me. I liked the way she made me feel.

It had been a long time since anyone made me feel curious. It had been years.

"Let's go over here," I led her away from the gardens and over toward the edge of the forest. There was a large iron fence that stretched across the property. It separated the woods from the common areas of my property.

"The fences are high."

"People used to sneak onto the land," I told her. "Teenagers, mostly. I put it up for their own safety."

"I sneaked up here once," she admitted. I was a little surprised by that admission.

"Is that so?"

“It was on a dare,” Eloise said. “I’m sorry for trespassing. I hope you won’t spank me again for it.”

“When you say it like that, with that sweet little sigh, it sounds like you do want to be spanked.”

“Me? Never.” She shook her head. “I don’t like that at all.” Then she winked, and I burst out laughing. When was the last time someone had made me laugh? Anyone? I couldn’t remember a time when I’d been with another human and they’d gone out of their way to make me smile.

“There was another reason for the fence.”

“What is it?”

I reached for my veil and lifted it, pulling it up and off completely. Eloise looked at me, but she didn’t gasp when she saw the scars. She didn’t look scared.

I felt naked without the veil.

For years, I’d kept my face covered from everyone. Even when I’d slept with someone, I’d kept myself covered. If I couldn’t keep the veil on, we turned off the lights. There had never been someone I wanted to tell before.

Eloise looked at me. She lifted her hand, and then tenderly, she reached for me. I closed my eyes as she touched my face. Her hand was soft, and her touch was gentle. She wasn’t being grotesque or vulgar. She was being caring.

Then she reached up on her tiptoes, and she pressed a kiss to my cheek.

“Thank you for sharing this with me,” she whispered.

I didn’t tell her that she was the only one.

“What happened?”

“I was attacked,” I told her. “I was in the yard with my...”

With my lover.

With Laura.

I had been in the yard with her, and she'd been there one moment and gone the next. It had happened so quickly that sometimes, it still felt like a bad dream I was just waiting to wake up from, but Laura had never come back, and my face had never been the same.

"I'd been in the yard with the woman I loved," I said. "Laura."

Eloise watched patiently, waiting. For once, she didn't seem like she was in a hurry, and I appreciated that so much. Usually, she wanted to get answers right away, but I needed a moment to collect myself.

"We'd been working in the garden, and there was a wild animal. I didn't realize at first that a bear had wandered so close. Laura looked over and saw that it was a cub. You're never supposed to be near a bear cub. Its mother is always close by," I told her. "Always."

We'd both grown up here. We'd known this. As soon as Laura saw the cub, she got up and started backing away. We both had, but we'd seen it too late, and the mother had already spotted us.

"We tried to leave before it spotted us."

"Bears are crazy," Eloise whispered. "They're unpredictable sometimes. Any animal is if it feels threatened."

I nodded, swallowing hard. I closed my eyes and then opened them again. Mostly, I just tried not to relive every single moment of what had happened. I could still remember everything. That was the biggest problem with pain, I'd discovered. You always wanted to believe that it would stop. You always wanted to believe that one day, things would be different for you.

After she died, I had this idea that I'd wake up one morning and feel whole and complete again. Somehow, I really bought into the idea that I could be a whole person even after everything that happened.

That simply wasn't true.

The reality was that once you lost someone, there was something inside of you that broke. There was a part of me that could still hear her screams as the bear tore her apart. I had tried so hard to get to her. I'd tried to save her. As soon as the bear turned, attacking me, everything went black.

I don't know why it left me alive, but for years, I wrestled with that knowledge and that pain.

I should have been the one to die.

"It killed her," I whispered.

"I'm so sorry."

"It left me these," I gestured to the scars on my face. "I didn't want anyone to know."

It was stupid.

Hiding behind a veil did nothing.

It only gave people something else to stare at. Still, if they were looking at a veil, then they weren't looking at me. They weren't looking at who I had become, or how I had screwed up, or what I failure I was.

I hadn't even been able to save my own lover. How pathetic was that?

Eloise was kissing me before I realized what was happening. I'd gotten lost in my own little world, but she started drawing me out of it. She kissed me slowly at first, and then faster, needier. Her hands were on my face, and even though I was the one in charge – I was always the one in charge – I let her lead.

Just this time.

We ended up on the ground, lying together on a pile of leaves and flower petals, and we kissed each other over and over. Our clothes came off, and

soon our bodies were entwined, and I couldn't think of a moment when I'd felt so safe.

Or so scared.

9.

Eloise

She didn't have to tell me about Laura, but she had. That had to count for something. I wasn't sure what, exactly, but it counted for something.

After Genevieve's confession about her previous lover, and about her scar, things seemed to change between us. I couldn't tell whether things were deepening between us naturally, or if there was just a tighter connection because of what had happened.

Either way, we started spending more time together. Already, we would read together before bed in the evenings, but I found that she was coming to work out with me more frequently. She also seemed to find ways to sneak away from work so we could share meals together.

Having lunch or breakfast with her felt right. It was relaxing, and it was fun, and as the days passed and turned into weeks, I found myself growing more and more comfortable.

Still, I didn't stop thinking about what I'd found behind the painting. The secret passageway was there, and part of me wondered why I hadn't taken the chance and used it. The rest of me knew exactly why. Once I stepped into the secret passageway, I wouldn't have much time.

If I went into it during the day, I'd have to hurry. I wouldn't be able to make any mistakes in figuring out where to go. Besides, I didn't even know if it actually did go somewhere. What if it led to nothingness? What if it led to a place where I was just stuck?

I wanted to escape from the castle. I did. Really. It was just that the time wasn't quite right. If I wanted to give myself plenty of time to explore, then I'd need to go into the tunnel at night, and to do that, I'd need a flashlight.

Resting in bed one night, I realized that it was time for me to make up my mind. The truth was that it had been easy to fall into a routine at the castle. Margaret was kind, and she took very good care of me when Genevieve

wasn't around. When Genevieve was around, well, that was pretty wonderful, too. Genevieve wasted no time in making me feel like she owned me. She dominated me at every turn. No matter how much I thought I was my own person, she constantly showed me that I was hers.

After awhile, I'd started to believe it.

I felt like hers.

There was just one problem: it didn't feel as bad or as scary as it should have.

Being Genevieve's meant that I was safe, and I was cared for. It meant that no matter what I did, someone was there to take care of me. It meant that she was watching out for me. She did more than just make sure I drank plenty of water and worked out every day. She also made sure I had plenty of things to read. She was checking on me all of the time to make sure that I was happy, and to make sure that I was doing things that brought me joy.

She was wonderful.

And I...

Well, I was still thinking of going to see my dad. I wanted to ask Genevieve about it. How would she feel if I brought that up? I didn't have to ask because I knew what her response would be. She had mentioned a few times that he was a terrible person. I knew she hated that I couldn't see it.

Still, he was my dad.

I got out of bed and walked over to the painting. I reached for the button and pressed it, opening the portrait. Then I stepped inside. As with the rest of the room, the hallway inside was pitch black. I should try to find a candle or something, I knew.

I didn't want to turn on my bedroom light because I didn't want to take the chance that someone walking down the outside hallway might see. What if Margaret was wandering around looking for Dominique?

No, I left all of the lights off. Feeling bold, I walked down the hallway, feeling with my hands so I could see where I was going. The sides of the passageway were covered with wallpaper, I guessed. They were smooth and soft: not rough, the way I'd expected them to be.

I'd only made it a few steps when I touched something on the wall.

"Is that a light?" I whispered. Feeling up, I touched it again. Sure enough, it felt like a light bulb or electric torch of some kind. I felt around on the walls for awhile until I found a switch. Then I flicked it on, and the passageway sprang to life.

"I am an idiot," I muttered. I'd never considered that there might be built-in lights in the passageway. They were undoubtedly impossible to see from any of the bedrooms. Otherwise, what good was it to have a secret passageway?

I walked back to the opening to my bedroom and reached for a little handle that was on the inside of the painting. Then I pulled it, swinging the door closed. Instantly, I breathed a sigh of relief. I was in the secret passageway, and unless someone came looking for me in my bedroom, they wouldn't realize I was here.

Good.

I started walking again. This time, I took in the space I was in. The walls, as I thought, were covered in a pale pastel wallpaper. It was the ugliest thing I'd ever seen. I wondered who had selected it. Obviously, it hadn't been Genevieve. Did she even know about this passageway? She must.

I walked, and soon I came to a little hole in the wall. It was a sort of peephole.

"Seriously?" I muttered. Gross. I hadn't seen a peephole in the painting by my room, but then again, I hadn't really checked. There was a little placard that said Room 12. I pressed my eye to the little hole and peered into the room, but in the darkness, I couldn't see anything.

Either that, or the peephole had been covered.

I kept walking and passed rooms 11, 10, nine, eight, seven, and six. Each of them proved impossible to see into. Then I reached a little placard that said hall, and I pressed my eye to that hole. Sure enough, I could see out of it. The hallway lights were on. I could see paintings that decorated the hallways, and I realized that I was probably looking out of one of them.

Strange.

I kept going, walking down the passageway. So far, I hadn't seen a way into any of the other rooms: only labels and places that let me peer into them. After awhile, I did find a little door, but I couldn't tell where it led.

I wasn't sure whether it was a good choice or not, but I reached for the light switch next to the little door, and I flicked it off. Then I opened the door and stepped out.

Instantly, I knew I was in a place where I shouldn't be. The hallways were dark. I was definitely in some sort of hall. I wasn't in the guest rooms anymore. How long had I walked for? I closed the painting behind me and squinted, trying to see in a dark. There was a window nearby and it cast just the faintest amount of light on the hallway. I could see the walls covered in paintings. I memorized the one I'd stepped out of in case I needed to find it again.

It had a picture of a bear on it.

I wondered if it was something Genevieve had commissioned after the accident. That would be a little morbid, wouldn't it? Maybe it was just something she had lying around. Perhaps it was a painting she kept because she liked it. I had no real way of knowing. The bear was big and menacing. It towered in the center of the paintings. There was nothing else: just the bear.

Still, I had a feeling that the painting was of a bear that actually existed, and that the bear in question was decidedly enormous.

Where had the painting come from?

And where was I?

I'd been exploring the castle for what felt like weeks. I was certain I'd been with Genevieve for awhile. I didn't have a calendar, and I hadn't bothered trying to count the days, but I'd gotten so comfortable in the space that it almost was starting to feel like I belonged.

Almost.

There was one place in the castle where I'd never gone. There was a door that was locked eternally. It led to the west wing, and that was the one place Genevieve had made me promise to never go. I spent a lot of time thinking about the west wing and what it might feel like to go there.

After all, if it was good enough for her, shouldn't it have been good enough for me?

That wasn't a very healthy way of thinking, I knew, and the truth was that this wasn't my castle. I didn't have the right to go just anywhere. I wanted to, though. I wanted to go to the west wing and I wanted to explore. I wanted to know what secrets Genevieve was hiding.

I wanted to know everything that made her who she was.

Was this that wing?

I walked slowly down the hallway. I made my way over to the window. I peered outside. I could see the forest, but not much else. It looked similar to the view from my own room, but that didn't mean anything.

I could see the forest, and I thought of what Genevieve had said. She had been with someone once before. She'd loved someone. Laura. I wasn't sure whether I felt jealous or aroused at the thought of Genevieve being with another person. We were not together in the traditional sense of the word. In fact, we weren't a couple at all. She was my mistress and I was her...

Well, I was whatever she wanted me to be, I supposed.

I made my way down the rest of the hall until I reached a set of two heavy oak doors. I hesitated for a moment before I pushed them open. I was curious. Was this going to lead to my freedom? At the very least, it might give me some answers.

I still didn't really understand why Genevieve had accepted me as payment from my father. Couldn't she have found another way? The day she'd come into the bookstore had been a strange sort of day. In some ways, it seemed as though she hadn't quite made up her mind just yet.

Did seeing me make her realize that she wanted to take me?

And who had captured me?

She'd never told me who the person was that took me. I wondered sometimes, but it didn't seem like it was even worth asking. She had opened up a little, yes, but I wasn't under any impression that things were going to change between us.

Genevieve was the one in charge.

I was only a prisoner, at the very least, and a pawn, at the very most.

I pushed the doors open gently. They moved, revealing yet another hallway. Okay, so this was definitely a private place that I wasn't supposed to be. The hallway was empty, save for several doors. Each one was ornately designed with carvings of different animals on them. Which one led to the outside world?

That was where I wanted to go, after all, wasn't it?

I wanted to go home.

I wanted to go see my father and to talk to him.

I wanted to find a way to be free, and to find answers, and to reassure myself that this had, at the end of the day, all just been a very bad dream.

I chose a door. It was the one with the bear carving on it. After Genevieve's story, I was left with more questions. Whether I was going to find answers or an escape, I'd find them by pushing open the door.

When I stepped inside the doorway, I was surprised to hear music playing. There was a large pole in the center of the room. The floors were wood, and the rest of the room was empty. There were mirrors everywhere, though.

Everywhere.

Unlike the rest of the castle, this door hadn't been locked. I'd been able to walk right in, and that felt kind of wrong somehow. It was as though this room was so decidedly private that there didn't need to be a lock. After all, who would dare intrude on Genevieve's space?

"You're not supposed to be here."

Her voice rang out, and I whirled around to see her standing behind me in the doorway.

"I-I-I..."

Somehow, I couldn't even figure out what I was supposed to say. The words simply wouldn't come.

"You came through the passageway."

It wasn't a question, so there was no use in denying it or trying to say that she was wrong somehow. She'd known. I wasn't sure how, but she'd known that I was using the secret passageway. She'd known that was how I would try to escape.

How had she known?

Or had it all been an elaborate set-up?

Genevieve was the type of person I really couldn't figure out. I didn't know what to think about her. In some ways, she was the epitome of perfection. She was beautiful and she was well-dressed. She was obviously educated,

and she was wealthy. She was charming when she wanted to be. On the other hand, she was vicious and she was wildly feared. Everyone was afraid of her.

So which one was the true her?

Which one of those personas was the genuine Genevieve?

“I’m sorry,” I finally said. “I know I’m not supposed to leave my room.”

She laughed, but it was a cold sort of laugh.

“You aren’t sorry.”

“Yes, I am,” I whispered.

“You’re just upset you got caught,” she raised an eyebrow, challenging me, and I knew well enough to bow my head and stare at my bare feet. Okay, so leaving my room had been a huge mistake. She was right: I wasn’t sorry at all. I was sad that I got caught, yes. I was sad that I’d made a mistake. I couldn’t tell if she was disappointed in me, but I kind of got the feeling that this had been a test, and that I’d failed.

Genevieve had been fair. She’d been mean when she’d spanked me, and it had been a little embarrassing, but she’d been fair. I’d earned the few punishments I’d received, and I realized now that there was more to this situation than I’d understood before.

I needed to be honest now. If I told the truth, and if I was up front with her, perhaps the punishment would be less. There would still be a punishment, I knew, and it would be something dirty and shameful and wicked. It would be something that I loved and hated, and I despised myself for being curious about what it might be.

“You’re right,” I whispered. “I’m not sorry I sneaked out. I was curious, and I wanted to leave the room.”

“And the castle.”

“And the castle,” I sighed.

“Why?” She stepped forward, out of the shadows, and she reached for me. She gripped my chin, tilting my head back so that I was looking right at her. There was no way for me to look away.

“What?”

“Why are you trying to leave?”

“You know why.”

Her fingers pressed tighter into my chin. I hated the way my body reacted to the move. I’d never considered myself to be someone who might like pain, and yet every time she pressed her hands into my skin, I reacted. Heat filled my core, and my body started aching with desire.

I wanted her.

I didn’t want to want her, but I wanted her.

“Tell me.”

“I want to see my father.”

“He. Left. You.”

“He didn’t have a choice!” I cried out, and Genevieve dropped her hand from my face and grabbed my hair instead, tugging it back. Again, I was forced to look at her.

“Eloise, we always have a choice,” she said. “And right now, you have a choice.”

This was it.

This was the punishment.

I knew it was coming. Even as I had sneaked out of the bedroom, I'd known that there was going to be a risk and there was going to be a reward. Was I actually willing to risk breaking Genevieve's rules if it meant getting what I wanted?

At the time, I'd decided that it was worth it.

I'd decided that hey, I could sneak out, and I wouldn't have to pay the price. Well, apparently, that had been a bad decision, and I was definitely about to pay the price.

"Yes, Mistress," I whispered.

"You have displeased me. If you thought I wasn't aware that there was a passageway leading out of your room, then you think me a fool."

"No, Mistress," I whispered, even though I had thought perhaps she'd forgotten about the passageway.

"You had the choice to stay in your room or to leave. You chose to leave. Now you have a chance to choose your punishment."

There it was.

That word.

Before I'd come to the castle, I'd never worried about things like punishments. My father hadn't punished me. My boss hadn't punished me. Even my mother, when she'd been alive, had never punished me. My girlfriends definitely hadn't. Yet Genevieve was demanding more from me than I could possibly give her. She was demanding that I give her not only my body for her to use and punish, but my mind, as well.

She was making me choose.

She was making me decide what path I would travel.

"Yes, Mistress."

“You will not be receiving an orgasm tonight,” she said clearly. She loosened her grip on my hair and took a step back. She stood comfortably, looking over me.

I wasn’t naked. That was another breach of protocol. She always wanted me naked at night, but I’d slipped on my exercise clothing before I’d gone into the passageway. My reasoning had been that it was dark, and possibly dangerous. I hadn’t wanted to ruin my skin. I hadn’t wanted to get dirty.

Genevieve, however, was not wearing exercise clothing. She was wearing a thin black tank top with black boy shorts. Her dark hair hung long and loose over her shoulders, and she watched me carefully.

“Orgasms are for good girls,” she said. “And you have been a very bad girl, Eloise.”

I bit my lip and nodded, willing myself not to cry. I knew I’d disappointed her, and I hated that.

“I can offer you the same punishment I gave Margaret the night she told you my name,” Genevieve said. “I can pull you over my knee and spank you until your bottom is sore, and then I can send you off to bed without any sort of orgasm or release. Of course, Margaret would get to watch. It would only be fair.”

I swallowed hard. Would I like having Margaret watch me in that sort of position? I’d watched her, after all. I’d seen her punishment, and I’d loved every second of it. Watching her be spanked had been incredible. Wonderful. She’d spread her legs just a little, and she’d angled her bottom up to get closer to the mistress’ hand.

Would I do that?

“And the other choice?”

“You can dance for me,” she said, gesturing to the pole. “And then you can make me come.”

I looked over at the pole. It was a straightforward sort of thing. It stretched from the ceiling to the floor, and I wasn't naïve enough to not know what it was for. It was a dance pole. People danced on it. Did Margaret dance on this pole for Genevieve? Had Laura? Maybe Genevieve danced for just herself. I didn't know, and I didn't want to ask.

I looked back to Genevieve. She raised an eyebrow, waiting. To me, it seemed as though I had equally difficult choices. Being spanked was going to hurt physically, and it was going to be humiliating to have Margaret watch.

On the other hand, I had no experience dancing. What if I did a bad job? What if my performance was so horrible that Genevieve just laughed at me? I liked the idea of making her come, but I wasn't sure how I'd do it.

"You're over-thinking," she said.

"I'm not."

"You are."

I just stared at Genevieve. Maybe she was right. That was something I'd always had a tendency to do.

"Close your eyes," Genevieve said.

I closed them.

I could barely hear her footsteps as she came back over to me. She pressed her body against mine, and she cupped my neck, holding it tightly. Her thumbs rested on the front of my neck, pressing in just a little.

Just enough to remind me that she owned me.

Then she pressed her lips onto mine. She kissed me passionately, deeply. Just when I was about to groan, to moan against her mouth, she pulled back enough to whisper to me.

"Choose."

There was no time left to decide, and so I chose the thing I thought Genevieve would enjoy the most because at the heart of everything was a desire to please her, to make her happy. She might be my captor, but she was also the woman I was falling in love with.

It was wrong, and it was horrible, and if my father could see me, he would be disgusted, but I wanted her so very much, and I wanted to do something that would show her that despite my desire to flee, I thought she was the most beautiful and incredible woman I had ever known.

“I will dance for you,” I whispered.

My words hung in the air.

She paused, hesitating.

It was then that I realized she hadn’t expected me to choose that. She hadn’t expected me to be brave in that way. She’d thought I was going to choose the sweet and simple spanking. After all, I’d had one before. A dance would be harder, after all. Besides, the dance held a second challenge.

When I was done swaying my hips and moving my body, I was going to have to tantalize her. I was going to have to prove to her just how magical our relationship really could be.

I was going to have to make her come apart.

“I’ll dance for you,” I whispered again, and then I moved to the pole.

10.

Genevieve

It was not often that someone managed to catch me off-guard, and yet Eloise was absolutely full of surprises. When I presented her with the reality of a punishment, I was certain she would be frustrated and annoyed. I even suspected she would protest the fact that I was going to hurt her over innocent curiosity.

She didn't protest, though. She didn't complain or argue. She didn't beg me to let her out of the punishment, and perhaps that was the strangest thing of all.

"Very well," I said. I moved to the side of the room where I kept a turntable with a selection of vinyl records. A lot of people didn't realize that even many modern artists would put out their albums on vinyl. Yes, they were more expensive than CDs or digital downloads, but they sounded so crisp, and so fresh, and so perfect.

I put on a song I was certain she'd never heard. I wasn't going to make this easy. It was a punishment, after all. As soon as the music started, I grabbed a wooden chair and pulled it out from the wall. This was my studio: my haven. I came here for dancing both on the pole and on chairs, so there was a lot of space to move in. I set up the armless wooden chair about ten feet away from the pole. I didn't want to be too close.

This couldn't feel intimate for her. It couldn't feel personal. She was supposed to feel excited, anxious. Wild. She was supposed to feel like she was dancing for an audience she couldn't quite understand. That was me.

I sat, leaning back in the chair, arms crossed over my chest. It wasn't often that someone danced for me, but I was happy it was Eloise who was doing the dancing.

She walked to the pole, and she touched it.

This was the part I loved about getting a dance. I loved when the dancer met the pole and ran her hand over it, as in a sort of greeting. That was the best thing about pole dancing in the whole world. People had this idea that pole dancing was something that people did when they were down on their luck. They didn't understand that when it was you with your pole, nothing else in the world mattered.

It was you against everything.

You could climb, and you could spin, and you could float.

You could fucking fly.

Eloise touched the pole, and the dance began.

I watched as she moved around it slowly, casually. At first, I watched her with a sort of methodical consideration. I watched her the way a teacher might analyze or consider a student. She was gripping the pole too tightly at first. She moved like she was thinking too hard.

"Don't over-think," I called out.

Immediately, her hand loosened. That was good. She was supposed to use the pole to accentuate her dance. She wasn't supposed to hold it so tightly that she tarnished it.

Eloise walked around the pole several times, and then she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and looked over her shoulder at me.

She didn't say anything as she teased up her shirt. She wasn't supposed to be wearing any clothes at all. She knew that, of course. It was another thing she was being punished for. She lifted the edge of her shirt just a little, revealing a touch of skin, and then she dropped the shirt and walked around the pole again.

Then, she stopped and began to sway in time with the music. She moved her hips back and forth, and she kept her hands on her body. Soon, I wasn't

thinking about the fact that she was dancing well. I wasn't analyzing each movement and looking for mistakes.

I was just losing myself in her.

She twisted her hips in figure-eights in time with the music, and she tugged her shirt up, up, up. Then it went back down, down, down. I found myself moving, wiggling in the seat. I was excited. I wanted more.

It was a strange feeling since I'd seen her naked plenty of times, but somehow, this was different.

Somehow, being able to see her moving so delicately and sensually was driving me absolutely mad.

And I wanted so much more of it.

Finally, she tugged her shirt all the way up and tossed it aside. Her breasts bounced free, moving as she continued to dance. Then her hands were on her breasts. She cupped them, squeezing them a little, and she moved just a tiny bit more.

Fuck.

She was going to be the death of me, I realized.

Her pants came off next. Again, it was slow. She moved in a way that was beautiful and wonderful. Mesmerizing. I couldn't take my eyes off her no matter how badly I wanted to. When she was naked, she ran her hands over her body, and I watched, imagining that I was the one touching her. No wonder people loved going to strip clubs so much. This was incredible, and the best part was that it was a private show just for me.

Slowly, she moved around the pole, dancing for me. I leaned back in the chair and watched as her movements grew more and more beautiful. As she moved, she became more comfortable with herself. She became more open to the situation, and it showed in her movements. While she had been jerky

and awkward for the first few movements, she was quickly blossoming into something more.

She was like a beautiful butterfly coming out of her cocoon, and she was driving me wild.

The song ended, and she paused, looking over at me.

"Come to me," I said, and she took a step forward.

"Not like that," I said. "Crawl to me."

It was a hard command for someone to follow. It was a hard command for anyone to follow. This was supposed to be hard, though. It was a punishment, after all. Although, as the moments passed, it began to feel a lot less like I was punishing Eloise and more like I was rewarding us both.

She lowered herself to her knees. She knelt for a moment before she started to move. Then she dropped her hands to the floor, and the crawl began. It was slow. She watched me as she moved, and I took in everything about her: her beautiful hips, her wide eyes. She placed one hand in front of the other until soon she was right in front of me.

She knelt there, and then she placed her hands on my thighs.

"Mistress," she whispered.

"Eloise," I said. "I don't think your dance is done."

Another song had started playing, and she climbed up onto my lap, lowering herself onto me. She placed her hands on my shoulders, and then her hips started to move.

Perhaps in that moment, I should have had more self-control. Maybe I should have been patient and waited just a little bit longer for Eloise, but I was tired of waiting. I grabbed her hair and I kissed her, pulling her closer and closer to myself.

The entire time, her hips were moving. They never stopped. She was getting more and more into the song, more and more into our movements, and I was delighted with just how incredible the moment was.

Soon she was breathing heavily, and I pulled away from her. She mewed in response: a beautiful sound.

"No," I whispered. "Don't you come. You know the rules."

Another protest, but she stopped moving. She held my gaze then, looking at me.

"I know the rules," she repeated breathlessly.

"What are you supposed to do next?" I asked her quietly.

"Make you come," she whispered.

Yes, she knew the rules.

Eloise knelt down in front of me. She opened her mouth and pressed her lips to the inside of my thigh. First she kissed up and down one side. Then she repeated the motion on the other. I closed my eyes, enjoying the way she was touching me.

Usually, I was more in control than I was being right now. Generally speaking, when I was with someone, whether it was a new partner or not, I was wildly protective of my need to dominate. With Eloise, I found myself allowing her to touch me and tease me and play with me.

Why was I letting her do that?

It was obvious that this was no longer a punishment and instead, a desire to enjoy her physically. I wanted to feel her and I wanted to touch her. I wanted her lips all over every part of me. Then I wanted just a little bit more.

"Mistress," Eloise murmured against my skin. She looked up at me, and I nodded, giving her permission to do whatever it was that she wanted to do.

She reached up and tugged at my boy shorts. I lifted my hips so she could pull them down, and she did. She pulled them to the floor and tossed them aside. Then she ran her tongue up and down my leg one more time.

Finally, she moved her mouth to my core, and she kissed me there.

To say it felt like heaven would be an understatement. Having Eloise's tongue against me felt like utter perfection. Despite the fact that she seemed wildly innocent at times, she proved to be a generous and careful lover. She reached beneath me, holding my bottom tightly with her hands, and she buried her face between my legs.

Over and over, she kissed me, teasing me and licking me and pleasuring me. I reached for her hair and touched it, holding it as she brought me closer and closer to the edge of orgasm. She could tell when I was close, and despite the fact that I hadn't expected to actually have an orgasm with my captive that night, I found myself sighing with relief as I came undone. Eloise kept licking me and touching me as I soared, floating high above the clouds.

My heart seemed as on fire as my body was.

When it was over, she knelt back and looked up at me. She placed her hands on her knees, as though she wasn't sure where else to put them.

"Thank you, Mistress," she whispered.

Such polite behavior. She was a good submissive, I thought. She was not what I had expected when I'd brought her into my home, but she'd proven to be wildly incredible.

"Of course," I whispered.

She stood up, then, and looked at me for a long minute.

"I'm glad I found you," she whispered.

It was the most innocent and heartfelt thing anyone had ever said to me, and for just a second, I thought about asking her to stay the night with me. It

was only for a second, but the thought terrified me. She wasn't supposed to make me feel like this. She wasn't supposed to make me want to be around her.

She was my submissive.

It was her job to do what I wanted her to. It wasn't her job to push me into some sort of idea that we were just a normal couple.

We weren't.

There was nothing normal about taking her away from her family.

There was nothing ordinary about stealing her away from society.

That's what I had done. I had completely stolen Eloise away from everything, yet she was looking at me like I was her damn queen.

She stared at me like I was her savior, but I wasn't. That wasn't in my job description, and it wasn't something I had signed up for.

Nope.

Not at all.

I was just the bitch who kidnapped her.

"Get out," I said. I looked at her then, and I closed my mouth. I wasn't going to smile or pretend to be tender with her. She'd made me come, yes, and it was the best orgasm I'd ever had in my life. I wasn't going to pretend that it wasn't, but I also wasn't going to admit there'd been more to our exchange than just pleasure.

I wanted her.

I wanted to keep her and to make her smile and to make her laugh.

There was no chance of any of that happening. After Laura died, I promised myself I'd never love again. I swore it. People thought I wore my veil

because of my scar, and that was part of it, but there was another part of it.

I was in morning.

I was sad about the loss of my true love. I was hurt and pained by the fact that she was gone. Worst of all, I was horrified that I had started to envision a future for myself with Eloise in it.

“What?” She whispered. The smile fell from her face.

“Get the fuck out,” I hissed.

Eloise didn’t wait to see if I was joking. Obviously, I wasn’t. She wasn’t welcome here anymore. She reached for her clothes and started tugging them on. She turned her back, but not before I saw the hot tears starting to roll down her cheeks.

“I don’t know the way back to my room,” she whispered, turning back to me. For a second, I thought about reaching for her and pulling her into a tight hug. I thought about promising her that everything was going to be okay. There was a little part of me that wanted her to believe that I would take care of her and protect her and love her.

Then my brain clicked on, and I remembered that I was far too broken for someone as innocent or as pure as Eloise.

She wanted to go back to her father, anyway. She didn’t want to stay with me. I was smart enough to know that she’d been thinking about ways to escape.

“Don’t bother,” I said. “Consider your debt paid.”

“What?”

“You owe me nothing, Eloise. Leave my castle.”

She stood there, staring at me like a lost fucking kitten. Her arms were at her sides. She was totally unguarded. She wasn’t scared or afraid of me. She looked nothing like she did that first day when I’d seen her in the bookstore.

Then, she'd been timid and nervous. When she'd arrived at my home, it had been the same. She'd been scared and uncomfortable and worried.

Now, though, she was a damn goddess.

And she was brave.

And if she stayed here, I was going to destroy her the way I destroyed everything.

"What do you mean?" She whispered. "Genevieve, whatever I did, I can fix it. I'm really sorry, I-

I stood up then, not bothering to pull my shorts back on. I marched over to her and slapped her in the face.

Hard.

It made me feel sick even as my palm connected with her skin, but I had to get the message out.

"Leave," I hissed. "I don't ever want to see you again."

Eloise reached for her cheek, touching the place I'd hit her, and she turned and left the room. She fled. She ran, racing away from me and everything this place stood for.

Good.

She deserved to have a second chance.

I knew she could do better than me.

Only, as she ran away from the west wing, and as she ran out of the castle, I couldn't help but feel a knot growing in the pit of my stomach. I'd had the most perfect thing in the world, and I'd fucking ruined it. I picked up the chair I'd been sitting on when she danced, and I threw it at one of the many mirrors that lined the wall. The mirror shattered, and glass fell, but I didn't care.

She was gone, and I was alone.

As I should be.

11.

Eloise

Iran.

Maybe I shouldn't have. Perhaps I should have been more brave, more compassionate. Maybe I should have stayed longer with Genevieve. I could have stuck around, and I could have been stronger.

There was a part of my heart that wanted to stay in the castle, but the rest of me knew that my life could never be full if I stayed. I would be leaving too many questions unanswered. There were too many stones I wanted to turn over. There were holes in the stories that wove themselves in and around my life, and there were pieces missing.

More than anything, I needed answers.

The only place I was going to find those was back in Southaven. I would make my way back, and I would find my father. I would ask him what had happened, and then I would find out whether Genevieve had been truthful about him. Although I had been so certain at first that he was innocent, I now wondered whether Genevieve had been the truthful one. There were too many questions. There were too many inconsistencies.

Genevieve was a monster.

Everyone knew it.

Everyone knew that she was scarred, and she was broken, and she was scary. She was disgustingly wealthy, and she was the type of person everyone owed money and favors to.

There was something else, though.

I had seen something new and different in Genevieve. Especially when Genevieve was taking care of me, she had a soft side. There was a part of

her that wasn't so terrible. There was something more to Genevieve than most people realized.

She could be kind, and she could be sweet. I thought that Genevieve must have been wildly misjudged much of the time. That had been an obviously lonely sort of life. I felt a little pang of regret as I ran, fleeing the castle. My feet pounded as I ran, and I stepped on twigs and other things in the darkness. Genevieve had kept her promise to take care of me. She had watched over me in every way.

I was repaying that kindness with running away, and the knowledge of this made me feel just the slightest bit sick.

Still, I ran, and I didn't slow down for a moment.

I knew the way back to Southaven. Even in the darkness, I made her way easily back to town. The only problem was my feet, but I found that moving slowly meant that my feet wouldn't hurt quite as terribly.

The moon shone bright as I ran away from the castle and toward the main road. Then I hurried all of the way back home. I ran a little, walked a little, and scurried a little. My movements were awkward and forced, but I didn't let up. Although Genevieve was aware that I had run away, I was still a little scared that she would suddenly decide to come after me.

If she did, I didn't know if I'd have the strength to fight her.

When I'd touched her, she had been wonderful.

Warm.

Compassionate.

She had been so gentle and so patient with me. Despite the fact that I hadn't asked to be taken or spanked or touched or adored, I had been, and I had gotten used to Genevieve on many levels. Our relationship was a fucked up mess of chaos, but...

Well, it was our mess.

When I neared the village, and when I could finally see the tops of the buildings reaching up, stretching toward the sky, I breathed a sigh of relief.

I was back.

I was home.

Only, when I thought of the word "home," I no longer thought of my father's house with its tiny spaces and barren interior. Instead, I thought of Genevieve's castle. I thought of the way I felt when my Mistress came to me.

And I thought of the way Genevieve had looked when she'd fallen apart.

Making Genevieve come had been a challenge and a reward all wrapped into one. It hadn't been a punishment at all. Oh, the mistress of Castle Blood may have said that it was a punishment, but it wasn't. Seeing her close her eyes and just lose everything was incredible. She was always in control, always in charge, but for once, she'd managed to let go just for a moment.

It had been incredible.

Delicious.

I reached the edge of town and I stopped, looking over the place I had grown up. Suddenly, it didn't look quite as idyllic as it always had to me. Now, it looked more...sad.

Lonely.

It looked like the kind of place that was wildly forgettable. Still, it was where I'd come from, and that stood for something, right? It had to mean something. It had to. This was the place where I'd taken my first steps and where I'd gone to school. It was the place where I'd said goodbye to my mother.

I looked for just a moment, and then I started walking. I headed down the main street and past the bookstore, and then I went straight to my father's house. I was surprised to find that the lights were off and the house

appeared empty. It was early in the morning now: almost time for the sun to come up.

Where could he be?

He was usually awake by that point, and even if he wasn't, the front porch light should have been on. My dad was the kind of person who liked to leave a light on in the darkness. Besides, shouldn't he have left it on in case I came home?

Maybe he wasn't actually waiting for me.

That thought was sobering to me.

Could it really be possible that my own father wasn't tearing apart heaven and Earth to find me? Wasn't he supposed to be out searching for me? Wasn't that what fathers were designed to do? They were supposed to protect their daughters.

He was supposed to protect me.

I thought of Genevieve's statement. My mistress was the one who told me that my father had essentially traded me to Genevieve. The mistress had said it was over a debt he had been unable to pay. That was what she'd said. Staring at the house, I hoped it wasn't true.

It couldn't be true.

I didn't want to believe it, but the lights were off, and the house looked abandoned. I had expected that my father would be looking for me. At the very least, he should be waiting for me, shouldn't he? His health, as far as I knew, had been poor for a long time. Perhaps walking around outdoors wasn't the best way to take care of himself. Still, he could have left a light on.

What if I came home?

There was a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realized that nobody was waiting for me. Nobody was looking for me. I didn't even think

that my father was home. Still, I had to check. I needed to see for myself whether or not he was actually there.

I walked up to the door, and I turned the knob.

Locked.

I tried knocking, but nothing happened. I stood there for a minute, wondering what I should do. Maybe I should go looking for a spare key. As far as I knew, there wasn't one, but apparently, there were many things I didn't know. What was one more?

There was a person walking by who stopped and looked over at me.

"Looking for Peter?" They called out. I didn't recognize the person. It was an older man and he had greying, shaggy hair and a big hat. It was a strange sort of hat. It was almost as strange as having a conversation about my father's whereabouts in the middle of the night.

"Yes," I said. "Have you seen him?"

"He's probably at the bar," the man yelled. He jerked his thumb in the direction of the town bar. "That's where he always is."

So it was true.

All of it was true.

"I heard he was sickly," I said carefully. Obviously, the man didn't recognize me as Peter's kid. Why would he? It was late, and it was dark, and as far as anyone knew, I'd been gone for awhile. My father had probably even made up a story about my disappearance. Maybe he'd told people I left on my own. Perhaps he'd told people that I wandered away and had never looked back. I had no way of knowing.

Hell, he could have even told people that I'd ditched him: left him on his own.

"Sickly?" The man laughed.

“Is that not true?”

“Of course, it ain’t true! Well, unless you think about the way he treats that kid o’ his.”

“Why,” I asked slowly. “How does he treat his kid?”

“Oh, you know,” he said.

“I don’t.”

I did.

“He makes that kid work to take care o’ him. Can you believe it?”

“Maybe they have some sort of agreement,” I said carefully.

The guy shook his head, and I was hit with a wild amount of emotions all at once. My father had betrayed me. I’d known it before, but hearing it from a stranger hurt. A lot.

“No agreement,” he said. “Peter is a snake, through-and-through. He works that kid to death and then he spends all her money on drinking. He’s at the bar. Mark my words.”

The man turned and shuffled away into the night, and I stood there for a long time, letting his words sink in.

So it was all true.

All of it.

Everything Genevieve had told me was true. It was a problem for me for so many reasons. My father had sold me to a monster, but she wasn’t really a monster. I’d been captured by a horrible woman, only I’d started to fall in love with her. She’d taken me away, but I kind of wanted to be taken by her.

I didn’t want to go back to my old life.

I didn't want to go back to how things had been before.

What was I going to do?

I sat down on the porch steps for a moment and dropped my head in my hands. I shook my head. This was too much to handle: too much to bear. It wasn't fair. Was it? None of it was fair. My dad was a bad person. He was a horrible man and he'd destroyed my future. Now I had a chance to confront him.

Was I brave enough?

In the past, I would have gone to him and begged him to change. I would have asked him to change who he was and what he was doing, but I felt like selling your kid was a pretty clear decision.

So, I went to the bar.

I knew where it was even though I'd never been inside. Maybe if I'd been bolder in the past, I would have gone and gotten a drink after work, or I would have gone there on dates. As it was, I'd been shy and nervous. I'd been scared, and I'd let my fear dictate how I lived my life.

No more.

I went right inside and tried not to cough when I was overwhelmed by the smoke. Okay, so people could smoke inside. Noted. I walked forward, making my way toward the back of the room. There wasn't a bouncer, and the bar was fairly empty. Aside from a couple of people smoking cigars by the front door and a lone woman dancing by the jukebox in the back, it seemed someone desolate.

Except for the man at the bar.

Even with his back to me, it was obvious who it was.

My dad.

He really was here.

He really was drinking.

I made my way closer. He was talking to the bartender, and he seemed to be having a good time. He seemed strangely at ease here, and that was something I hadn't really gotten from my dad recently. Before I was taken away – sold – my dad had always seemed so frail and sad.

Well, he seemed pretty damn fine right now.

I started to feel a little bit angry.

“She’s gone now,” he said as I walked up, staring at the bartender.

“Genevieve doesn’t come around unless you call ‘er,” the bartender said.

“I ain’t calling her.”

“Why would you? You’ve got nothing left to give her.”

I stilled, listening to their conversation.

“I’ve got plenty,” my father said. “Besides, Eloise will come back eventually.”

“She’s going to know what you did.”

“She’ll never know. She trusts her old man,” my father said.

“You give yourself too much credit,” the bartender shook his head.

“How about you stay out of my business?” My father said.

The bartender lost his smile, frowning at my father.

“And how about you remember whose establishment you’ve set foot in? Peter, this is a place where you are allowed to be, and you’re only allowed to be here when I choose to allow it, so do us both a favor and lose the attitude.”

Then the bartender's eyes were on me, all of a sudden, and he nodded toward me.

"Last call," he said. "You want something?"

Did I want something?

Yes.

I wanted so many things.

I wanted everything.

I wanted to live in a place where my father didn't determine my fate. I wanted to be part of a world where he could just give me away. Perhaps most of all, I wanted a life where I didn't have to make the choice I was about to make.

Instead of answering the bartender, I stepped closer to my father. He turned as I approached, opening his mouth, as if to say hello, but his smile dropped when he saw me. Almost instantly, the shock on his face was replaced with surprise.

"Why, Eloise," he said, faking a cough. "Whatever are you doing here? Where did you go? I was worried."

"Cut the lies," I said. I fisted my hands and took a deep breath. I wasn't going to punch him or fight him, but damn if I'd let his lies hurt me again.

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't be a fool," the bartender rolled his eyes. "She heard every word you said, asshole." Then the bartender walked away, shaking his head. My father glared at him before turning back to me.

"Where have you been, Eloise? You didn't tell me where you were. I was so worried I had no choice but to turn to drinking!" He gestured to the empty glass in front of him, as though that was going to change my understanding of what had happened.

Well, I wasn't a little kid anymore.

I wasn't going to believe those lies.

"I know what you did," I said.

"What are you talking about? Eloise, let's go home. We'll go home and we'll go to bed, and in the morning, we can talk about where you've been. It's been troublesome, you know, having to get my own medicine. Oh, I wish you'd told me you were leaving."

He stood up, looking frail, and then he reached for his cane, which was beside him. So maybe that part, at least, was real.

"I know what you did," I said again.

"Eloise, you're spouting nonsense."

"No, I'm fucking not!" I yelled, and all of a sudden, the bar seemed to be quiet.

"We're closing," the bartender called out. The lights came on and the few patrons proceeded out of the bar. Soon it was just me and my dad standing there.

"You sold me," I whispered. "You traded me."

"You've got it all wrong."

"You gave me away because you were broke," I said.

"It's not like that."

"Then what's it like, Dad?" I spit the word out. It tasted gross in my mouth, venomous. I would never again call him Dad. From now on, it would just be Peter.

He sighed.

“Ever since your mother passed, I’ve just had so many responsibilities. You know that raising you has been so taxing on me. Raising a child is very expensive, and I’m just a poor man.” He looked at me with wide, innocent eyes, and I knew exactly how I’d fallen for his tricks so many times.

I’d wanted to.

I’d wanted to believe him.

I had wanted, more than anything else in the world, to think that my dad could be trusted.

Well, he couldn’t.

I was the one who was going to pay the price for what he’d done. He had drank, and he had smoked, and he’d made all these horrible choices, but I was the one footing the bill.

“I never want to see you again,” I said.

He wasn’t going to apologize, I realized. There was no reason for me to wait around and see what he had to say. He wasn’t going to tell me that he was sorry or that it was all a mistake. My father had made his choice. He was going to spend the rest of his days trying to cover it up: not make amends.

“You’re making a mistake,” he said.

“I think you’ve already made enough mistakes for the both of us.”

I turned to walk away and felt his hand grip my arm. Tight. I looked over at him sharply, and I was surprised to see venom in his face.

“Now you listen here, you little bitch,” he sneered. “You’re going to do exactly what I say. I don’t know why the monster let you go, but you’re mine now.”

I jerked my arm away and shook my head.

“You’re nothing but a sad, pathetic old man,” I said.

Then I turned and walked out of the bar, and I didn’t look back. As I made my way out onto the streets and started walking, I heard the echoes of the barman’s laughter. The bartender, at least, thought the situation was amusing.

“She told you!” He called out as the door slammed shut behind me. I wasn’t able to hear what my father said, but I didn’t really try. I didn’t need to. Instead, I started walking, and I tried to clear my head. I just walked and walked, and soon I found myself back on the road and traveling to Genevieve’s castle.

It was probably a bad choice to walk right back in and ask the mistress for her forgiveness. I shouldn’t have run away, to be sure. It wasn’t really fair to her. She had been expecting someone who was submissive and kind and wonderful, but I had been wild and crazy.

And I’d liked her.

I’d liked her so much.

Would she welcome me back?

Would she let me stay?

All I knew was that despite the fact that I’d upset her, I couldn’t stay away from her. I wanted her, and I now had proof that out of everyone I’d ever known, she was the one who had been honest with me. It kind of seemed like she was the only one who had been honest.

I ran and I ran and I ran, and finally, I neared the Castle Blood. It was almost morning. The morning sun was just about to rise, and the sky had started to change colors to welcome it. I hurried, making my way closer to the castle.

I was in such a hurry that I didn’t see the baby bear at first.

I was focused intently on reaching the castle and on getting to Genevieve, but then I heard its little bear sound, and I stopped in my tracks. There it was, just outside of the castle gates. It was close to the place where the forest reached the road.

“No,” I whispered, shaking my head. “You can’t be here.”

I remembered hearing, once upon a time, that bears are usually the most active at dawn or dusk. Was that true? I hadn’t even thought to look for animals. I just wanted to get back to Genevieve. I wanted to tell my mistress that I was sorry, and I wanted her to know that I wasn’t going to run away again.

I backed up slowly, moving in the direction I’d come from. There were forests on either side of the road, but the bear was completely blocking my way back to the castle. I could go sit somewhere. I could go wait. That would be a good plan, wouldn’t it? That was it. I’d go wait out the bear.

I knew, even as I backed up, that this plan wasn’t going to work. There was a mother bear close by. There had to be. That was what happened. How horrible was it that everyone who loved Genevieve seemed to get eaten by bears? That’s what was going to happen to me, I knew. I was going to be attacked and killed and possibly digested by the bear, and I didn’t want that.

I only wanted her.

Part of me wished I’d never left the castle in the first place.

The rest of me knew that I needed to focus on escaping.

So I backed up. Slowly, I walked down the road in the direction I’d come from. The baby bear didn’t move. In fact, it hardly even noticed me. I couldn’t reach the castle by the front gate, I realized, so I’d need to go in through one of the back or side entrances. That meant I was going to have to go into the woods, and I really, really didn’t want to go into the woods.

Still, I went, immersing myself in the darkness, and I made my way around the castle. Was Genevieve still mad at me? I hoped she’d had time enough

to calm down, but I wasn't sure. What if she was still upset? What if I showed up and she became angry or upset with me?

I couldn't think about that, I knew.

I needed to just get inside, and then I'd be able to talk to her, and then everything would be okay.

I ran, making my way through the shrubbery and trees, and I reached one of the back gates. It was locked, but I found a space where there was a fallen tree. One of the recent storms must have knocked it over. I climbed up on the log, balancing as well as I could, and I climbed over the fence, landing hard on my feet.

Ouch.

They were going to be sore, bruised, and probably cut tomorrow, but I was inside of the castle gates, so everything was going to be okay.

It had to be.

I ran, making my way to the back door. It was locked, but I knocked for a long time. Nobody came, so I tried the front door. I knocked and knocked and knocked, and finally, the door opened.

Dominique and Margaret were standing there, frowning. They looked me up and down, and their eyes narrowed.

"What are you doing outside?" Margaret asked.

"Aren't you supposed to be in your chambers?" Dominique wanted to know.

"It's a long story," I said. "But I need to see Mistress."

"Yes," Dominique lifted his nose at me. I'd say that's an understatement.

"You should get cleaned up first," Margaret whispered. "You don't want to get in trouble for leaving the house."

“Margaret, we can’t lie to her about this,” Dominique said sharply. “You remember what happened last time.”

“I just think there’s more to the story,” Margaret said. “There is, isn’t there?”

“Something like that,” I said. “But I don’t need to clean up. Please, can you get her? I will wait for her in the sitting room.”

Then, without waiting for them to say anything else, I went into the sitting room and stood in front of the fire. I didn’t dare sit down on the couches or touch anything at all. I knew I was dirty and muddy and disheveled from my night of running around. I also smelled horrible: like sweat and despair. It was an ugly sort of combination.

Now that I was inside, and the fear of the bear had subsided, I wondered if I’d made the right decision coming back.

Then the doors opened from behind me, and I heard her voice.

“Eloise?”

I turned around, and I saw Genevieve’s gentle smile and her wild concern, and I knew.

I just knew.

It didn’t matter what had happened between us before. It didn’t matter that our pasts were messy. It didn’t matter that my father had given me away or that Genevieve had accepted the transaction. She wasn’t the monster people made her out to be. She was so much more. She was wonderful and incredible and beautiful, and I was in love with her.

I’d made the right choice in coming back to her.

12.

Genevieve

She was back.

And she was looking at me with horror and sadness and relief.

Relief.

She was relieved to see me, and I was wildly happy to have her back with me. I crossed the room quickly and grabbed Eloise, pulling her into my arms. I reached for her and kissed her. Then I pulled back and just looked at her.

“I thought I’d lost you,” I said. “I’m so sorry.”

I’d spent the night crying, devastated. I’d been upset with myself and my ability to take care of her, which had faltered horribly. I’d let her down, and I hated that I’d chased her away. Part of me had always suspected that she might, at some point, want to leave. I knew that she’d want to go see her father and find out if he was truly the awful man that I said he was.

Had it been a self-fulfilling prophecy?

I’d expected her to leave eventually, so I’d just chased her away. How childish was that? How trite? It was a foolish thing to do.

I’d gotten scared, and I’d been cruel. I’d been horrible to her, and I’d broken her heart, so she’d run. Had she been scared? Had she been afraid? I’d pushed her away from me, unable to accept the fact that I might be able to love someone again, and I felt sick about it.

When she’d actually gone, I wondered if I’d ever see her again, and the thought had broken my damn heart. As a result, I’d broken most of my paintings and my fair share of porcelain teacups in the west wing. Probably, I should have had more self-control, but I hadn’t. I’d destroyed so many things as a way to cope with the fact that I thought I’d lost her.

The truth was that Eloise looked like hell. I didn't know what she'd been through, but it hadn't been pretty. She'd come back covered in mud and leaves and there were a couple of twigs in her hair. Her feet were caked in dirt and I was pretty sure they were bleeding in some places.

I didn't care about any of that, though.

I just cared about her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Don't be sorry."

I was the one who needed to be sorry. I had been so cruel to her, and I'd chased her away. The castle wasn't the same without her. She'd brightened my world in so many ways. I wasn't about to let her go again.

"I was scared," I whispered. "And I was wrong. I shouldn't have been so horrible to you."

"It's okay," she said.

"It's not, but I'm going to make it up to you," I vowed. I'd spend my whole life making it up to her if I had to. I'd do whatever it took.

"I went back to town," she said. "And I found him. I found my...I found Peter."

So, she knew.

She wasn't calling him dad, so she knew exactly who he was and what he'd done. She understood, realistically, what kind of person he was. The knowledge that she had basically been hurt by her father stung. I didn't wish that on anybody. He was a cruel, horrible person, and perhaps I was cruel and horrible for accepting Eloise as payment for his crimes, but I didn't care.

I needed her, and it looked like she needed me, too.

“I’m sorry,” I told her.

“It wasn’t you,” she whispered. “He really didn’t care about me.”

There were tears streaming down her face. Her skin was so dirty that each tear seemed to wash away the dirt, leaving streaks on her cheeks. I reached and cupped her face, and I brought my lips to hers.

“You’re safe here,” I promised her.

“I know I am,” she said.

She kissed me, pulling me close to her, and then Eloise dropped a bomb I wasn’t expecting.

“There was a bear outside,” she whispered. “When I was coming back. There was a bear. That’s why I’m so dirty. I went through the woods.”

Instantly, I felt faint. I felt like my entire world was crashing and burning. A bear? Here? It couldn’t be. My fear of animals was so wildly unrealistic and unbelievable that it didn’t really make sense. Yes, I’d been hurt, yet I was continuing to live in fear from an animal that most people considered to be innocuous unless provoked. The reality was that bears rarely attacked. Most of the time, they were happy to be left alone. It was just on the off-chance that someone you knew got too close to one, or a mother felt threatened, that it...

“But I’m okay,” she whispered.

“You’re okay,” I repeated.

“And I’m here,” she said.

“You’re here.”

“And I love you.”

The words hung in the air between us for a long time. I let them sink in and register before I said or did anything.

Love.

She loved me.

And I...

“I can’t live without you,” I whispered.

I kissed her again, pulling her close, and then I took her to the west wing. I brought her into my private space, and I pulled her into the shower and cleaned her. Together, we washed away the dirt and the pain and the sadness from the day, and then we just held each other for a long time.

When we made our way back to my bed, we made love quietly and slowly, taking our time to truly savor every inch of one another. When Eloise came, it was the most perfect sound anyone had ever made in the world, and I felt alive.

I felt truly, wonderfully alive, and I knew that no matter what happened next, everything was going to be okay because we were together. She was by my side. No longer was she a captive. I’d freed her, after all, but she’d come back to me. She’d shown me that she wanted to be with me, that she adored me, and I made a silent vow to spend the rest of my life keeping her safe and making sure that Eloise felt truly loved.

Forever.

Epilogue

Eloise

Two years Later

The woods surrounding the Castle Blood were beautiful in the fall, and today was no exception. From my perch up in the tower, I looked out and saw the yellowing leaves. Some of the trees were already barren and naked, and they held promises of what was to come.

There was a knock at the door and then Genevieve walked in.

“You knocked,” I said, surprised. It was Genevieve’s home, after all. She almost never knocked. The Mistress only shrugged, but she smiled.

“Well, it is your special space,” she said.

Together, we’d turned the tower into a library. Bookshelves filled the walls, and there were pillows in the center of the room to sit and read on. Somehow, I’d managed to find space for an art easel in the room, so sometimes, I’d come stand by the window and paint.

I wasn’t particularly talented yet, but I did my best, and I’d already completed several large paintings that were now hanging in the west wing in Genevieve’s private hallway. Today I was working on something new: a painting of a woman running through the forest. She was looking behind her, over her shoulder, so her face was hidden from the viewer.

“It’s beautiful,” she said.

“Thank you.”

“She seems afraid.”

“I don’t know,” I shrugged. “I think she seems very brave. Probably, she has someone or something she’s running to.”

“Who do you think she’s running to?”

“Someone she loves.”

I looked over at Genevieve. It had been two years, and I could say without a doubt that I loved her. More than anyone or anything else in the world, I was crazy about her. Okay, so our relationship had started in the most horrible and awful way, and it was still a bit strange and awkward sometimes, but for the most part, things with Genevieve were wonderful.

Learning to love another person was never easy, especially when you had things in your past you were struggling to get over. Having someone to care about helped, though. A lot.

The last two years had been a whirlwind of chaos and wonder, and despite being completely betrayed by my dad, I never felt like Genevieve had let me down. If anything, she’d stepped up and helped me to deal with the chaos created by my father. There was no doubt that our relationship was an unconventional one. After all, we both knew I had been her captive, but over time, that had changed.

She’d let me go, and I’d come back to her, and this was where I wanted to be. Now, instead of feeling trapped at the castle, the only thing I felt was comfort, and I knew, without a doubt, that when I looked at Genevieve, I was home.

Forever.



THE END

If you enjoyed this book, check out **LESBIAN CINDERELLA** by Kitty Jones.

Author

Kitty Jones writes stories about naughty girls and the women who love them. She also writes paranormal and science fiction erotica. Kitty writes both F/F and M/F stories. When she's not busy writing, she's traveling the world with her nose stuck in a book. Please join her mailing list for updates and be sure to follow her on Amazon.

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Teach Me

Kate was nervous when she walked into the SOAR pole studio for the first time. After a terrible break-up, she was ready to start doing things for herself. She wanted to do things because **she** wanted to, and not just because other people thought that she should.

Lisa had been a student at SOAR for more than three years when she finally had the chance to audition to become an instructor. She was nervous, but she finally got her first class. As luck would have it, she had a bunch of beginner students, and Lisa found that she just couldn't keep her eyes off of one of them.

Kate was beautiful, sweet, and awkward, and Lisa found herself wanting to help her become more than just a newbie. She wanted to help her learn everything there was about mastering the pole.

Lisa can't resist the urge to teach Kate how to fly, how to spin, and how to pose, but more than that: she wants to teach her to love again.

TEACH ME is an erotic lesbian romance that will keep you turning pages and begging for more.

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The Doctor's Naughty Little

Want more Kitty Jones? Check out The Doctor's Naughty Little. (This is a M/F romance.)



Melanie Blake didn't want to go to her doctor's appointment. She sat in the parking lot and looked at the clinic. It looked...cold: cold and unwelcoming. She didn't want to go, didn't want to step inside those doors. It held nothing for her. There was nothing good in there: nothing at all.

Only, she knew that she had to pluck up the courage it would take to walk through those doors. She needed to visit the doctor. She needed to go inside and she needed to talk to someone and there was nothing else that could be done about it.

It was all her fault, really.

That's why she was there.

She had made a bad choice, slept with a bad person, and now she had to face the consequences of those actions.

And oh, were those actions so not worth it.

Sleeping with one person might have been enough on its own, but she'd slept with several, and she hadn't been very careful or safe or sane about it. Consensual? Yeah, it had all been consensual, and it had been fun, but it hadn't sated her desires. It hadn't given her what she really needed.

And now she was here.

She was at the doctor's office and soon she was going to go inside and face the consequences of what she'd done. She was going to be brave and bold and she was going to be fierce. Slay. That's what she was going to do: fucking slay.

She'd hesitated long enough, though, and finally, Melanie decided to get out of the car. She slammed the door shut harder than she should have. For a second, she thought about apologizing to her little Saturn, but she thought twice. She was already being punished by coming to this appointment. She didn't need to traumatize herself further by saying she was sorry to a hunk of metal.

She went into the doctor's office and walked up to the receptionist's desk. Melanie tried to breathe normally. She could do this. She could be normal. Only, part of her thought that she couldn't. She had never really fit in and she certainly didn't fit in now. Not here in the doctor's office.

The clinic was full, which was probably to be expected for a Monday afternoon. People were here with their kids and their grandmothers. Everyone needed to get a checkup today, apparently, but she was the only one here for the kind of check that she needed, and that made Melanie feel embarrassed.

"Can I help you?" The receptionist asked. She had dark black hair and it was pinned up in a neat bun. It was a little intimidating, but Melanie tried to remind herself that the woman wasn't here to judge her. The lady wasn't interested in that. She was just doing her job.

"Hi," Melanie said. "I have an appointment with Dr. Grey."

"What time is your appointment?"

"Two-thirty."

"Name?"

"Melanie Blake."

"Okay, Melanie. Is your insurance information the same?"

"Yes."

"Have a seat," the receptionist motioned to the office. "And we'll call you back as soon as we can."

“Thanks,” Melanie said, remembering her manners. She headed over to one of the chairs and sat down next to a lady who was bouncing a little baby on her knee. The kid had a carefree life, Melanie thought. Seriously. That kid didn’t have a thing in the world to worry about, did he? He could do anything, be anyone. He could do whatever. All he had to worry about was his mom, and she would take care of him.

Sometimes Melanie wished her life could be more like that.

It wasn’t, though.

Instead, her life was a series of bad choices that had severe consequences. Namely, they wasted her time. She shouldn’t have partied last week. She shouldn’t have done anything she’d done because now, not only was she sitting at the doctor’s office, but she was also without a job. Who knew how long she’d be unemployed? Finding a new job wasn’t always easy. It could be weeks or even a month before she had a new place to work.

Shit.

She might have to move back in with her mother.

Just then, she heard her name.

“Melanie,” a friendly nurse called from the doorway. Melanie tried not to pay attention to the people staring as she made her way over. She had essentially skipped the line, but she wasn’t sure why. Once they were in the back hallway, she looked at the nurse.

“Shouldn’t those other people be first?” She asked.

The nurse shook her head. “They’re seeing Dr. Shelly today. Besides,” the nurse said, tapping the chart. “Dr. Grey thinks you need to be seen urgently.”

“Urgently?” Melanie gulped. “Why urgently?”

The nurse gave her a strange look, but shook her head.

“Come on,” she said. “Let’s get you into the exam room.”

Once they were in the room, the nurse weighed Melanie, took her blood pressure, and asked her a few questions about current medications. Then she asked the question that Melanie had been dreading.

“Okay,” she said. “Tell me, what brings you in here today?”

“Uh, where do I start?” Melanie laughed nervously. Was there any way she could just ask the doctor her questions? Did she really have to ask the nurse, too? That didn’t seem very fair. To be honest, the nurse seemed kind of nice. She reminded Melanie of a friendly grandmother, even though the lady was probably only 40 or 50 years old. It was still much older than Melanie. At 23, she was very aware of her youth and her ignorance. It kept getting her into trouble, after all.

“Start from the beginning,” the nurse said gently. She watched Melanie, listening carefully, and Melanie shrugged.

The beginning?

Okay, she could do that.

She tried to think of a way to explain her situation without sounding like a total and complete slut, only she couldn’t. She bit her lip and shook her head. Finally, she blurted it out.

“I had sex last week with some people,” she said loudly. Too loudly. There were people walking around in the hallway. She imagined they were standing outside of the door listening, but that would be crazy.

“Okay,” the nurse said. “So do you need to be checked for pregnancy?”

“No, I...I’m on the pill.”

“Did you use protection?” The nurse asked gently.

Melanie just shook her head.

“Okay,” the nurse said. “So you had unprotected sex last week and you’d like to talk to Dr. Grey about it.”

“Yes,” she said.

This time, her voice came out like a whisper, and she felt the heat of a blush erupting on her face. She couldn’t bear the fact that the nurse knew her secret now. She didn’t want anyone else to know.

Maybe she should just run away.

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Punishing the Babysitter

Want more Kitty Jones ? Check out PUNISHING THE BABYSITTER: now on Amazon!

Marcus didn't want to go home after work because it meant dealing with Vanessa. He was pretty sure she'd been stealing from him, but he couldn't be completely sure. Vanessa was his babysitter. Her job was to come over and watch Trisha while Marcus was at work. That was it. More importantly, it was only for two hours every day.

Vanessa watched Trisha from 3:30 to 5:30 every day after school. Trisha was in the second grade and was old enough to ride the bus home, but she still needed someone to walk her home from the bus stop, make her a snack, and help her get started with her homework.

That was supposed to be Vanessa's job. Until a few days ago, everything had been fine. Then Marcus had noticed a few problems happening.

First off, the twenty bucks he'd left on his nightstand was gone. That should have been the first warning. He was too trusting, though, and everyone knew it. That had always been one of his problems.

The second sign that she'd been stealing was that his favorite watch had seemingly vanished. At first, he thought he'd simply misplaced it, but now he knew better.

The final straw was that yesterday after Vanessa left, he noticed his wallet was open on the coffee table. He never left his wallet on the coffee table. The only place he ever left his wallet was on the table by the front entrance.

When he'd opened the wallet later, he saw that he was short ten dollars. Seriously? He paid her so much money and now he was out ten dollars on top of her normal wages.

Enough was enough.

Marcus had even gone to the trouble of casually asking Trisha if she'd taken any money from Daddy's wallet. He didn't want to jump to conclusions. After all, if he accused Vanessa of stealing from him, there was no going back.

But Trisha had said it wasn't her.

She claimed that she hadn't taken any money and that she knew her daddy would take care of her.

Well, today was the day. Marcus was going to confront Vanessa. He'd already arranged for his mom to pick up Trisha at 5:25. She would be there around the same time as Marcus. Then he could talk to Vanessa privately before he drove her home.

At least, he'd offer to drive her home.

She might not want it after he fired her.

Because he would have to.

Wouldn't he?

That's what you did when someone stole from you, especially a babysitter. Marcus sighed and stared at the clock. It was almost time to go home. It was time to face the music and talk with the babysitter about her bad behavior. It was time to let her know that naughty girls didn't get rewarded. Not at his home.

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